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TWELVE
GREAT PASSIONS

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THE NUN LUCREZIA

Photo by Alinari of head of Virgin from painting by Filippo Lippi



TWELVE GREAT PASSIONS



J. A. BRENDON

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PREFACE



AN apology, an explanation—both are owing by way of preface. °

They may seem to be a strange, heterogeneous collection of romances, the stories which compose this book, compiled in an utterly haphazard manner. At any rate I hope so, for I have deliberately chosen my subjects with this aim in view, making them representative of as many minds, as many ages, and as many nationalities as possible. And this I have done not merely further to corroborate the threadbare truth that human passion is the one thing which is the same the world over, and which never changes; not merely to show again, as often has been shown, how very small and very human are the greatest of us, but also to explain how really and supremely important a factor in the lives of all men is the accident of their affections.

I may be accused, and, if so, shall rightly be accused, of placing the love influence in these stories wholly out of perspective to surrounding influences. But this, of course, is unavoidable, and in making the error, I maintain I have erred on the right side, for these stories do not presume in any way to be a contribution to

PREFACE

biography ; they are merely romances, romances woven around now accepted facts. Hence, if they do anything to make the great persons who figure in them appear more real, more human and more comprehensible than can the calm, clear light of orthodox biography, they will fully serve their purpose, for that is their purpose—to reveal the man, not merely his career.

And which is the more important ? The answer is a matter for individual opinion. None the less, it cannot be denied that a great man's personality survives himself as a subtle influence which is as powerful and often more lasting even than his achievements. And that personality surely is shown nowhere more clearly than in the light of love affairs, those curious happenings which seem to have the power of changing destiny, raising some men, degrading others, the inspiration of desire, success, and failure.

After all, the man in love almost invariably is the true man. And he is the man in love whom here I have endeavoured to reveal.

That is at once my explanation and apology.

J. A. BRENDON

LONDON, 1912.

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**Fra Filippo Lippi
and his Model, the Nun Lucrezia**

Twelve Great Passions

I

FRA FILIPPO LIPPI AND HIS MODEL, THE NUN LUCREZIA

I

NCE upon a time there lived a man ; and, as is the way with men, he loved a woman. But the world had forbidden this man to enjoy the gift of love. Also it had forbidden the woman. And they—for the man was a good man, and the woman a good woman—strove to their utmost to obey the world. But this they could not do ; they found the power of love stronger than mortal ordinances. So they yielded to love. And in consequence great sorrows befell them. But, just as they loved nobly, so also they suffered nobly. Sorrow did not kill their love ; on the contrary, it strengthened it. In the end, therefore, the world repented of its harshness ; forgave the man his disobedience and blessed his union with the woman.

It is a charming story ; and well might it be told as

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a fairy tale. Nor does it lack a moral. Sincerity and integrity of purpose sometimes are rewarded—even on this earth. That is the moral. Is it a very wicked one?

Of course, Fra Filippo Lippi and the Nun Lucrezia had no right to fall in love with one another. Indeed, it was very wrong of them, for both had taken the vow of celibacy. Still, they did fall in love; and a more beautiful and noble love than theirs rarely has been known. Perhaps, then, if only for this reason, one can condone it, even as Pope Pius II, incidentally one of the best of all the Popes, at length condoned it.

Besides, it happened many, many years ago; in the fifteenth century, in fact—an age when manners, morals, customs, all were very different from those in vogue to-day. It happened, moreover, under a radiant Italian sky, and at a time when a new ideal was dawning in the minds of men. Europe at last was breaking free from the shackles of classic orthodoxy, seeking a truer and more natural life, a life of colour and of beauty. And Lippi, ever more of an artist than a priest, was at once a child and herald of this movement.

He was born in Florence in the year 1406, in a little street called Ardiglione, which ran behind the Convent of the Carmelites. His father kept a butcher's shop there; and, so it seems, kept it none too well, for, when he died, he left his son, then a lad some seven years of age, endowed with nothing save an immense imagination.

Thus, until the Church offered him a home, little Filippo was forced to eke out a miserable existence in the

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gutters of his native city, friendless and a pauper. It was a wretched childhood. Robert Browning has made him tell the hapless story for himself. And the poet's words baffle imitation. Thus it is he makes the artist speak :—

“ I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig-skins, melon parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me by one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight road to the convent. Six words, there,
While I stood munching my first bread that month :
' So, boy, you're minded,' quoth the good, fat father
Wiping his mouth, 'twas refection time,—
' To quit this miserable world ?
Will you renounce. . . ' The mouthful of bread ? thought I,
By no means ! Brief they made a monk of me.”

They made a monk of him—*made* a monk of him. That explains everything. Lippi did not seek the Church ; the Church sought Lippi, and, at first, sought him reluctantly. For a long while, in fact, the good friars despaired of turning to any useful purpose this small waif whom they had rescued ; he seemed likely to become neither scholar nor ascetic.

Yet, despite this, Lippi had his talent, a tremendous talent too ; and at last his benefactors found it. The

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boy was born to be an artist ; in time he would become a great artist. And the friars were very glad ; they needed an artist. Lorenzo Monaco belonged to the order of the Camaldese. The Dominicans could lay claim to Fra Angelico. But the Carmelites—whom had they to decorate their chapels ? They had no one. Ah ! but they would soon have Fra Filippo.

So they implored the boy to dedicate his work to them ; to live with them ; to paint for them. They offered him wealth ; they offered him peace. And Lippi—for in those days he had no thought beyond his art—accepted their offers unquestioningly, and with his lips cheerfully renounced the world, not realizing how great a sacrifice he was making to his genius. But with his heart he could not renounce the world, for in his heart he loved the world, and life to his eyes was full of beauty.

Doctrines such as his, then,—doctrines acquired, it may be, from the great Cosimo de' Medici, who later became his friend and patron—could not be confined within the narrow limits of priestly dogma.

Still, he was a good man was Lippi, despite his waywardness ; and he strove hard to perform his duties worthily. What is more, he did so perform them, and, as "the Glad Friar," won the love and confidence of almost every one with whom he came in contact. But his easy-going ways made for him also many enemies.

Now in 1450, one of them, prompted, no doubt, by malice, charged him with misappropriating funds—a

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serious accusation for a priest to face ; and Lippi, under pain of torture, confessed that he had been guilty. But guilty he was not ; of this there can be no doubt, despite his confession. The latter, in fact, counts as nothing. Men often have preferred to bear for ever even the stain of crime, rather than endure the torments of the rack.

Nor, would it seem, did Lippi confess readily, for, as a cripple, he carried with him to the grave the marks of torture. So soon as he had confessed, moreover, he recanted, swearing his innocence and demanding a fair trial. But the Vicar-General of Sant' Antonio refused to sanction the appeal ; he had good reasons. This even the Pope was shrewd enough to see, for, although he deprived Lippi of his spiritual functions—no alternative was possible—he specially reserved for him the revenues.

■ And then, a few years later, the artist was appointed to a post at Prato, as Chaplain to the Convent of Santa Margherita. Chaplain to a convent—such a position surely is not often offered to a priest guilty of forgery, however great may be his talent as an artist.

II

Now, shortly after he had taken up his new duties, Lippi set to work to paint a panel for the chapel, a picture of the Madonna, commissioned by the Abbess. The artist undertook the work eagerly ; to perform it was the ambition of his life. The picture, he

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resolved, should be incomparably his greatest painting ; and the central figure a Madonna such as never before had been conceived in the mind of man. She should be no mere form, statuesque and cold, gazing upon the world through hard, unsympathetic eyes as were the Madonnas of a bygone age. Nor should she be a lifeless, lovely figure as were the Madonnas of Fra Angelico.

No—she should be at once woman, mother, wife ; a woman to whom frail mortals instinctively would turn for sympathy ; beautiful and pure, but bearing unmistakably the stamp of sex. In short, she should be ideal, *his* ideal, the perfect woman, the perfect wife—an ideal, perhaps, incongruous in a friar. But Lippi, in whom had breathed the spirit of the Renaissance, was seeking to break away from the cut-and-dried rules of the past, and, for this reason, has been accused in common with most great men of having lived before *his* time.

But to find the model—that was his difficulty. For a long while he sought throughout the length and breadth of Italy, but sought in vain. One seemed too worldly ; another, too sad ; the third, too frivolous ; the fourth, too shallow. But at last he found the very woman he had been seeking, one who realized to the full the perfection of spiritual and physical beauty, and he found her where he had begun his search, at Prato—in the Convent, too. He saw her there one day, praying in the chapel.

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Her name was Lucrezia.

Now the worthy Abbess was very reluctant to allow the girl to sit as Lippi's model. Had the artist chosen one of her other charges, she might not have hesitated, but, in the case of Lucrezia, she regarded with grave misgiving so unusual, nay, so dangerous a practice, for the child—and in mind Lucrezia was still a child, despite her three-and-twenty years—did not appear to have found that spiritual contentment which a nun should find; although hidden from the world, she remained of the world. And sometimes this troubled the good Abbess. Still, to Lippi, she felt, she could safely entrust the girl. She liked the man, and, despite his unconventional ways, knew him to be of sterling worth.

Surely then, while under his care, no harm could befall Lucrezia. So she argued with herself. Then she yielded; for she wanted the picture greatly; and no model, the artist had declared, could serve his purpose other than Lucrezia.

Now she, when she heard of Lippi's wishes, felt strangely elated. The woman in her was strong, and, as the Abbess suspected, she valued admiration highly. The thought, then, that she from among all women had been chosen as a great artist's conception of the perfect, flattered her vanity. This, surely, was but natural.

The sight, moreover, of the lovely robe he had sent to clothe his Madonna, the robe which *she* was to wear, thrilled her every sense most wonderfully, arousing within her the dormant consciousness of womanhood.

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And with the robe came other rich apparel, and soft linen garments, linen such as she had never seen before ; the mere touch of it against her skin sent rushing to her mind forbidden thoughts, which, though she did not understand them, terrified her.

A new and very marvellous world seemed suddenly to be opening out before her, a world of life, of beauty and of danger. True, she had but a part to play in it. Yet that, even that, she found inexpressibly delightful—or very wicked ; she knew not which. Her sensations bewildered her.

Not a demure little maid, then, such as he had seen praying in the chapel, but a woman, proud and radiant, entered the room in which the artist already had arranged his easel. Lippi was astonished when he saw her. Her beauty, the dignity of her bearing, her self-assurance overwhelmed him ; and he was tongue-tied—he, “the Glad Friar,” who would fight a duel of wit with any man. The aged Sister, who accompanied Lucrezia, observed his shyness and was glad to see it, for, so she thought, it had been caused by pious modesty. She was an unworldly old woman.

As Lippi became absorbed in his work, however, his self-confidence returned. The picture—he was sure of it now—would surpass his wildest dreams ; it seemed to him she was the very Madonna herself who stood before him. Never before had he had such a model ; her expression, it varied at his will.

He soon ceased to think of her as a nun, and talked

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gaily to her, of the great world outside to arouse her interest, of the Medici Court to impart to her face a look of wonderment and pleasure. And his words filled Lucrezia with amazement; she forgot herself utterly; her whole being ached for life. Then he talked to her of the new learning and of friendship. They were beautiful doctrines, it is true, but dangerous. The nun looked sad. So Lippi sang to her to restore her cheerfulness, sang songs of love and passion, which stirred her soul in its very depths and made her eyes to shine with sympathetic understanding.

But the words of his song aroused the Sister who had been acting as *duenna*. Till then she had been dozing quietly in a corner of the room, and, being slightly deaf, had paid no heed to Lippi's conversation. But, as he sang, his voice reached her ears only too clearly; she could not allow him thus to sing of love, even for the sake of art. So she rose hastily to her feet, and rebuked him.

Then Lippi realized what he had done. But, for the present, anger triumphed. He resented the good Sister's interference; never before had he been able to paint as he had painted then. And now—the spell had been broken. Petulantly he threw down his brush. He would paint no more, he said; the sitting must close.

Then the Sister, sad at heart, led Lucrezia away. Had she done wrong, she wondered?

But she had not done wrong; and Lippi knew it.

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Indeed, no sooner had Lucrezia gone than he repented having spoken of matters which he had no right to mention. Already, it may be, he saw the rocks ahead ; saw whither he was drifting. He tried, therefore, to forget, and to help the woman also to forget. Accordingly, he busied himself with other duties, and made such progress with the picture as he could without another sitting, working on the background and the other figures. In this way a week elapsed, two weeks, three, a month. But it was impossible for him to do much while the central figure remained blurred and indistinct. A second sitting became imperative.

Besides, priest though he was, Lippi longed again to see Lucrezia.

Now, at the second sitting, not only did Lippi talk ; Lucrezia talked also, telling the artist of herself, her life, her hopes, her interests. Nor was there anybody to restrain her, for the good Sister who had been appointed as *duenna*, sorry for her former interference, discreetly left the room, determined not again to interrupt the progress of the picture. And she felt quite justified in doing so, for, like the Abbess, she herself had come now to think that Lucrezia, in spite of all, could not be left in safer hands than Lippi's.

So the girl talked freely ; and as she spoke, Lippi's respect and admiration for her grew apace. And soon, another new bond sprang up between them, the bond of sympathy, for her life story, so it seemed, closely resembled his. Her father, Francesco Buti, had been a

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merchant, but he had died when Lucrezia was only seventeen years of age, and had left the girl and Spinetta, her sister, dowerless and orphans.

Now in mediæval times, at any rate, the world was a dangerous place for unprotected girls. Lucrezia, therefore, following her sister's example, had fled to a convent, the Convent of Santa Margherita, and there sought safety. There was nothing else she could do. Forsaken by the world, she had left the world—hoping to forget. Nor, she maintained, had she had occasion to repent her action. Indeed, the Sisters had been very kind to her; so kind that in return she felt she could never show them gratitude enough.

Still, despite these words, regret mingled with her speaking. Nor did Lippi fail to notice it; and, in his mind, her regret raised infinite and awful possibilities. She had left the world, hoping to forget. But had she forgotten? Had she forgotten? He wondered. And as he wondered, those doctrines of Plato he had so lightly preached crumbled to nothingness, unable to survive the test of fact.

This the third sitting proved. It was a long sitting, and already the shades of evening were falling fast when Lippi moved forward to raise his model from her chair. And she needed help; sitting in one position had cramped her limbs. So the artist begged forgiveness for his thoughtlessness. He had detained her overlong, he said; and wearied her. Then he bent down to place upon her brow a light, Platonic kiss to show

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his gratitude. But Lucrezia—this was more than she could bear. Suddenly the woman in her triumphed ; she raised her lips to his, and Lippi's met them.

It was the first kiss of love ; and the picture, the "Madonna of the Girdle," was left for another man to finish.¹

III

On the following morning—it was the first of May—a bright and balmy day in the year 1456, Lucrezia crept stealthily and fearfully from the Convent, and, like the buds around her, opened her timid eyes upon the world.

At last she was safe, free now to live and love ; and the sensation amazed her with its wondrousness. She had no fear in herself ; all she had feared was detection. But now—now nothing mattered. She was free. An ecstasy of happiness flooded her heart.

Even the birds, in songs of rapturous bliss, seemed to rejoice with her ; whilst the very lights and shadows danced with glee. She had never known the world to be so beautiful.

Then Lippi met her—Lippi in his most joyous, radiant mood. This dispelled all her waning doubts, and the past and its restrictions faded, like some forgotten memory, utterly from her thoughts.

And surely in such a mood many another mortal has thus crossed the Rubicon of life. At such times, to

¹ The picture, now in the Municipal Palace, Prato, was finished by Diamante.

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live only in the present appears to be so easy and so beautiful that fear seems futile. None the less, though one may live in the present, it is the past which governs one's life. One cannot suppress the past; forget it, of course one can—but only for a while.

Together, then, heedless of everything save the joys of the present, Lucrezia and Lippi set out through the flower-strewn fields towards St. Alessandro. There Lippi found for the girl a place of refuge, which he could visit every day; and there for several weeks they lived, playing like two foolish children—this strangely mated pair, the woman young and beautiful, the man fat, crippled, fifty years of age; autumn wedded to spring, and living an idealistic dream in defiance of all the laws of nature and of man.

But of these happenings the world was sublimely unaware.

That Lucrezia had disappeared was, of course, known at the Convent, where, needless to say, it caused much consternation. But that she had run away with Lippi not a soul suspected. Indeed, the girl's unhappy disappearance seemed to worry the Chaplain more than anybody else. He acted his lie to perfection, and for the present, though he hated the task, continued to be punctilious in the performance of his duties.

Still, there was a future for him to consider, a future full of difficult and anxious problems. He and Lucrezia, as now he realized, had taken a bold and, maybe, foolish step. The likely consequences of their

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action afforded him much food for meditation. And, apart from that, there remained also to be solved the most elementary problem of existence.

What was he to do with Lucrezia? The question was no easy one to answer. Lippi was not a rich man; except for such money as he derived from the Convent, he had no income. And as for his savings—they were non-existent; like most artists, he had been a notorious spendthrift.

Some years before, however, during an affluent period, he had bought a house in Prato which, although he had furnished it, had never yet been occupied. As mistress of this house, he proposed now to install Lucrezia. The girl approved of the idea. But the house was big; she feared she might be lonely in it.

At Lippi's suggestion, therefore, she wrote to Spinetta, confessing all, and begging her sister to come and live with her. The Chaplain himself delivered the letter. And Spinetta, because she loved her little sister very dearly, yielded to the request, consenting for her sake to keep secret Lippi's wicked action. Besides, by living with Lucrezia, she hoped perhaps to be able to prevent further misfortunes from befalling her.

So it came about that the two missing nuns took up their abode within a stone-throw of the Convent. And, if only because of its brilliant audacity, a more effective place of concealment could not have been devised. Nobody suspected the identity of Lippi's two mysterious tenants. The secrecy of their movements, it is

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true, aroused some comment, as also did the landlord's frequent visits to the house. Still, even idle curiosity was not persistent, for . . . well, surely the artist's connection with the Convent was enough alone to disarm suspicion.

For eleven months Lucrezia lived thus at Prato ; they were happy months too, gloriously happy, but, even so, they contained their full complement of sorrows. In the first place, the secrecy of the life was hateful to Lucrezia. She had fled from the Convent hoping to find freedom, but instead—she found herself a slave to a still more inexorable master, a slave to convention.

And then again, the fact that she had placed herself beyond the pale of the Church's blessing distressed her greatly. Why, she asked herself, was she forced to be ashamed of this beautiful new love which she had found ? Why could not the Church sanction it and bless it ?

But in vain she sought for comfort in such questions ; she knew the answers to them only too well. Nothing, not even her lover's tender care, could still the voice of conscience ; relentlessly it harassed her ; and, as Easter drew near again, a great desire, so strong as to be irresistible, seized hold of her to confess everything, and plead for absolution.

Without telling Lippi, therefore, of her purpose, she sought out one day an aged priest, and to him told all the truth, reserving nothing. Nearly a year had elapsed since last she had confessed, and now, terrified by the

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awfulness of her wrong-doings, she stumbled pitifully through her sorry story. From behind the grating of his confessional the priest—for he was a kindly old man—did all he could to help her, listening with patient sympathy while she spoke. When she had finished, however, he told her firmly that she must renounce immediately both Lippi and his love. Till she had done that he could offer neither hope nor consolation ; and even so, he said, he would have first to refer the matter to the Bishop ; so great a sin he himself was powerless to absolve.

The answer was inevitable ; the priest could give none other. But, renounce Lippi, renounce her love, this Lucrezia could not do. She said so. The man who loved her, she declared, was more dear to her than very life.

“More dear than your Saviour ?” asked the priest. And Lucrezia was silent. So the confessor continued. “Consider my words carefully, my child,” he said, “and return to me to-morrow. I shall expect you.”

Then Lucrezia rose and went. But on the morrow she did not return. She could not renounce her love for Lippi.

Yet when religion wars with love the strife must be inevitably bitter ; and that which now had begun to rage in Lucrezia’s mind was indeed very bitter. From the first encounter, love, it is true, emerged victorious. That victory, however, was merely a Pyrrhic one ; the supreme struggle was still to come, and love then was forced to take the field, robbed of its most powerful weapon.

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So far as Lucrezia was concerned, no longer did the issue lie solely between Lippi and her God. A new element had entered the fray ; it cramped and impeded the inclinations of her love.

In short, the woman now found herself standing on the threshold of the greatest crisis in her life, the threshold of motherhood. Then suddenly she realized that, unless she could first make her peace with God, her child perforce must be born and reared a pagan. By returning to the Convent and renouncing all that she held dear, alone could she save his soul.

But this—could she do this ? It would be an awful sacrifice for her to make ; and by making it, as she saw only too clearly, she would rob her child of that which nothing could replace, the gift of a mother's love.

The choice was a hard one. And Lippi—he for his part was powerless to advise or help. However—and may this stand always to his credit—when finally Lucrezia yielded to the voice of conscience and decided, in obedience to the mandate of the Church, to sacrifice her love to duty, he made no endeavour to dissuade her. Bravely she made the sacrifice. Bravely he sought to make it easy for her. And thereby surely they atoned for everything.

Thus, for the sake of the unborn infant who had come between them, with smiles upon their lips and anguish in their hearts, the lovers parted. They resolved never again to meet alone. So Lippi went his way, and left Lucrezia to await the coming of the child.

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He was born in August, 1457—little Filippino who subsequently became an artist almost as great as his great father—and, but a short year later, the mother, true to her promise, returned to the Convent, where in due course she took her vows and became a nun. Thus, she had been assured, alone could she hope to make atonement and find consolation. Nor was that consolation withheld from her.

The man, however, found it harder to forget. He turned to the world—there was nothing else he could do—and so sought peace in work and in devotion to his son. But the world is a cruel place, and men, naturally intolerant of others' failings, are ever ready to misunderstand their actions. And Lippi's, though they did not know the truth, men misunderstood most woe-fully ; whilst conscience, which makes cowards of us all, oppressed the unhappy artist always with a hideous sense of shame, leaving him wretched and forlorn.

For three years thus he existed.

III

And here, no doubt, this romantic story would have ended, had it not been for the fact that a certain Messer Ignotus of Prato happened to dislike intensely the Procurator of the Convent of Santa Margherita, a certain Ser Piero d'Antonio di Ser Vannozzo.

Now in 1461, hoping to crush his enemy, Messer Ignotus issued an anonymous accusation, casting aspersions on the morals of the Procurator ; and, so as to

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substantiate the charge, coupled his name with that of the Chaplain, who, he declared (for during the past three years vague rumours had been circulating freely) had had a son by one of the nuns in the Convent, Sister Spinetta.

This was a very serious charge, certainly one which could not, under any circumstances, be ignored. Accordingly the *Ufficiali di Notte e Monasterii*, a body of magistrates, whose duties included the supervising of ecclesiastical institutions, summoned Lippi to appear before them.

But the Chaplain denied the accusation brought against him. It was true, he confessed, that he had had a son ; it was true, moreover, that the mother was a nun. But her name was not Spinetta. Nor, he maintained, was it either right or necessary that the mother's identity should be disclosed, for she had repented and been restored to her order.

The magistrates looked thoughtful. They would have liked to pardon Lippi, but this they could not do. So grave an offence nothing could condone, although it had been committed now three years ago, although during that time the friar had proved his penitence, acting as nobly as a man could act. Deprive Lippi of his chaplaincy they must at any rate. The magistrates had no alternative.

So they passed sentence. It was a just and lenient sentence too. This Lippi could not deny. Still it filled his heart with bitterness that the crown of hateful

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notoriety should be the sole reward of his repentance. To be robbed of his livelihood, branded with shame, forsaken by friends—even had he not renounced Lucrezia, worse happenings could hardly have befallen him. Besides, had she remained with him, he might have escaped ere now to some place where they were not known and could be living happily together.

Was his great sacrifice, then, all to be in vain? Was there to be no escape from the consequences of his broken vow? Justice seemed to him most wickedly unjust. The sense of his misfortune preyed upon his mind, killing his wit and former cheerfulness. Even his art forsook him. Paint he could not now; the inclination was no longer with him. His hand and eye seemed somehow to have lost their cunning; and not even the encouragement of friends and patrons could spur him on again to good endeavours.

The Glad Friar, in fact, went out from the court of law into the world a sadly altered man.

Cosimo de' Medici, however, who had watched the developments of this romance with interested amusement, now really was moved to sympathy by his friend's genuine distress. Accordingly, unknown to Lippi, he seized the first opportunity of interceding with the Pope on his behalf.

Now Pius II was a broad-minded man, charitable, and withal an intense student of human nature. The artist's hapless story, therefore, aroused his interest, and, as no doubt the Medici had foreseen, he forthwith summoned

FRA FILIPPO LIPPI AND HIS MODEL

Lippi to his presence. He wished to learn for himself if the facts of the case really were as they had been represented to him, and, if so, to right a manifest and grievous wrong.

But Lippi obeyed the mandate with grave misgiving. His worst fears, he thought, would now be realized, for he knew nothing of the Medici's action. Expecting, then, some further persecution, with trembling, anxious footsteps he entered the Pontiff's presence. Meet the Pope's gaze, he dared not. So, kneeling low, he kissed the ring held out to him, then stood, with head bowed down, to await the sentence.

To his surprise Pius spoke with kindly gentleness, bidding him tell in full the story of his unfortunate entanglement.

Lippi glanced up ; and a new hope sprang suddenly into his heart. The Pope was smiling at him. And so, without reserve, he told the truth, trying neither to excuse nor justify himself. Indeed, he even dared to say that, despite his penitence, his love for Lucrezia was as strong now as ever it had been.

After the conclusion of his narrative, for a moment there was silence, a moment which to Lippi seemed eternity.

That the Pope would forgive him he dared not hope, and yet—certainly, it seemed, he had listened to the story with sympathetic understanding. What, then, would he say ? The artist wondered anxiously. And as he wondered all his old fears returned, harassing and tormenting him.

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But the Pope said nothing. The crackle of parchment only broke the silence. Lippi again looked up. The Pope was holding out a document to him. Mechanically the artist took it in his hand, unrolled it, and read. . . .

But surely his eyes had deceived him. He read the document again. Then he glanced at the Pope.

And that one glance sufficed to tell him that what his eyes had read was true ; that he and Lucrezia had been absolved from their vows, and were free now to become man and wife.

For a moment Lippi stood as one bewildered, overcome by joy and gratitude. He knew not what to think, or what to do or what to say. But the Pope wanted no words ; he bade the artist go and claim his bride.

And Lippi went. Nor did he delay a minute, but rode, rode like a boy, despite ill-health and age, in hot haste for Prato.

Thus ends this story. There remains nothing to be told, since in those days marriage ceremonies were deemed unnecessary ; for a man and woman to be free to marry and to have lived together—that was sufficient proof of wedlock. Besides, henceforth the chronicler is silent. All we know is that, from now until his death in 1469, Lippi's genius shone as it had never shone before, and that in 1465 was born a daughter who strengthened still further the bond between Lucrezia and himself.

The Second Mrs. Shelley



MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

*From the drawing by Reginald Easton by permission of the
Bodleian Librarian*

II

THE SECOND MRS. SHELLEY

MUCH mud has been thrown at the name of Shelley. It was thrown freely during the man's lifetime. It has been thrown freely since his death. Still it is being thrown. And quite an unfair proportion of this mud found the mark, and stuck there. In fact, it has become orthodox even for comparatively tolerant critics to denounce Percy Bysshe Shelley either as a very bad man, or, at the best, as one of those incomprehensible, abnormal individuals whose warped sense of right and wrong renders it impossible for them to be placed in any ethical category.

And yet Shelley was not really very bad ; he was bad only in that he was abnormal ; and he was abnormal mainly because it was natural for him to be as other men are not. After all, he had but one small vice, and that a vice which, incidentally, is the chief virtue of the little hero of Kensington Gardens. Shelley refused to grow up ; he could not grow up.

Now, children—that is to say, normal children—have one distinctive quality—presumably it is the survival of

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some primitive instinct—they detest authority; they detest existing institutions, and regard discipline as a gross infringement of man's natural liberty, instituted merely to annoy. In the child such thoughts are pardonable, even in the youth. In the man they become a crime; education should have taught him the wisdom and advantages of discipline.

Shelley, for his part, however, learned none of these things. He hated discipline. He hated authority. He hated intolerance. And, from the day of his birth to the day of his death, he warred relentlessly on each of them, while circumstances aided and abetted him.

But posterity surely should be grateful to those circumstances. Indeed, but for their help, Shelley, as is befitting to the son of an old county family, the heir to a baronetcy, and a man with almost unlimited wealth at his disposal, would probably have grown up to become a respectable bishop, to hold a minor position in some Tory Ministry, or even to prove himself a conscientious though probably incompetent Colonial governor. And what a tragedy that would have been!

The world is not so rich in literature that it can afford to lose the genius even of one poet.

Now Shelley's violent hatred of authority dated from his very earliest years. It was, in fact, the only quality he shared in common with other boys; it, and a passionate liking for sensational literature. For the society of his fellows he had no use; he much preferred solitude and his own imaginings; whilst for

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games, skill in which is the golden road to schoolboy favour, he had no physical, and still less mental aptitude.

To elderly people, he thought, games perhaps were to be commended, for such people seemed often to be afflicted with cares and troubles which recreation was able to dispel. But for young folk to spend several precious hours of every week pursuing a ball and one another wildly round a field, young folk who had no cares, no troubles, nothing to do, in fact, save think and fancy what they would—well, it seemed nothing short of the ridiculous.

This attitude, needless to say, did not find favour for him in the eyes of other boys. Hence, unpopular though he made himself at his preparatory school, at Eton he made himself still more unpopular. The masters hated him. The boys, for the most part, regarded him as an object for contempt. They could not understand him; it was inexplicable to them how Shelley, who time after time proved himself a “funk” in the playing fields, could show such audacious daring in his resistance to authority; how he, who could not bring himself to stand up fairly and fight another boy, yet had the courage to conceal an elaborate electrical contrivance in a master’s desk so as to cause that gentleman severe physical discomfiture, and later, when summoned to his study to be punished, could pour corrosive acid on the carpet by way of protest against chastisement.

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A recent writer denies that Shelley was expelled from Eton. No doubt he is right, but the statement can be based on very little more than a technical distinction. Still, perhaps it is wise to compromise, and say that the boy left the school under a cloud. This certainly he did, and from Eton he went to Oxford.

Now at Oxford, where he found himself freed from most of the petty annoyances of his childhood, where physical prowess was not demanded of him, where philosophic imaginings were encouraged, and where discipline was comparatively lax, Shelley was able to divert his great discontent into wider channels. Accordingly having hurled opprobrium at his various dons, tutors, and professors, having denounced the government of the University and its whole system of education, he found time to turn his attention to such considerations as politics, ethics, and religion, until at last he evolved and published an amazing treatise entitled *The Necessity of Atheism*.

This was altogether too much for staid, academic Oxford, and—Shelley was “sent down.” He had disgraced his university. His university, therefore, disgraced him. But since his death—perhaps because he died tragically—a memorial has been erected to his honour within the walls of University College.

This is an action typical of Oxford, still more typical of England. It is a graceful manner of confessing mistakes, the mistake in this case having been made by a number of intellectual old gentlemen who hounded Shelley from their sight because, as a boy of

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eighteen, he ventured to deny the existence of a God.

Had the poet been allowed to stay there, Oxford might have saved him from himself, and have enabled him to become a useful member of society, within the accepted meaning of the phrase. But Oxford did not allow him to stay. Shelley was "sent down." And that decree confirmed and established for ever his hatred of intolerance. It was an event of supreme importance in his life.

All the while he had been at Oxford—indeed, be the truth known, even before he had left Eton—Shelley had been in love with his cousin, little Harriet Grove, a pretty, dainty girl of his own age. They were not actually engaged to be married; though there was a very definite "understanding" between them, recognized, nay, encouraged, even by their elders; that is to say, recognized until Shelley was "sent down" from Oxford.

This altered everything. Harriet's parents, his own parents also, ordained that the companionship must cease immediately; that he and Harriet must never meet again; that there must be no more letters, no exchange of messages, not even an explanation. And Harriet, for her part, obeyed their orders gladly. Greatly alarmed by this hideous thing which had happened, as disclosed to her by her parents, such affection as she bore for her lover had turned to horror, almost to hatred.

But Shelley—"I swear," he wrote, "and as I break

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my oath may infinity, eternity blast me—here I swear that never will I forgive intolerance. . . . You shall see—you shall hear how it has injured me. She is no longer mine. She abhors me as a sceptic. . . . Oh, bigotry! When I pardon this last, this severest, of thy persecutions, may Heaven (if there be wrath in Heaven) blast me.”

And so, robbed at once of life's two most gentle influences—Oxford and a woman's love—this dog with a bad name—went up to London, took rooms in Poland Street, and thence set out to wage war on society and its conventions.

II

Now, Shelley found his earliest disciples in this, his crusade against intolerance, among his own three sisters. Themselves suffering under the relentless tyranny of a boarding-school régime, they welcomed his doctrines; in fact, were immeasurably proud of their brother, this eloquent, æsthetic young reformer, with the face of an angel and a manner as tender as a woman's, who aspired with one stroke to sweep away centuries of man-made institutions, and restore to the world its primæval innocence and freedom.

Miss Harriet Westbrook, too, became a ready convert. She was a friend of Shelley's sisters, and, like them, a pupil at Mrs. Fenning's "Select Academy for Young Ladies." Being the daughter of a retired coffee-house keeper, who had saved some money, she had been sent

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to Mrs. Fenning's school at Clapham to be transformed into a lady.

But the process of transformation, it would seem, she found to be utterly distasteful. At any rate, she hated intensely both Mrs. Fenning and Mrs. Fenning's school. No wonder, then, she threw her sixteen-year-old self, heart and soul, into the campaign instituted by Shelley against oppression. Besides, instinctively, almost unconsciously perhaps, she realized immediately in her commercial little mind the possibilities of friendship with such a man, a close friend of the Duke of Norfolk, the heir to a baronetcy. Her sister certainly did.

The sister was older, fifteen years older; she warmly encouraged the acquaintanceship. So also did Shelley's sisters. The schoolgirl's love for romance was strong within them; and this they thought romance indeed. They used to send Harriet, therefore, to their brother's rooms with little gifts of money—his father had cut him off with the customary penny—and messages and notes.

And Harriet went gladly. She felt like the heroine of a penny novelette, a feeling she had always longed for, and thought much more of what she believed to be Shelley's admiration for her than she did of Shelley's cause; whilst he, for his part, delighted with the apparent enthusiasm of his first real convert, persuaded her to commit all manner of gross insubordinations, for which Mrs. Fenning punished her most fearsomely.

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But Harriet rejoiced in her martyrdom ; rejoiced in being denounced as the friend of an atheist. She had no idea what an atheist might be, but found it very delightful to be able to go to one with the story of her woes ; to hear him breathe words of hope and consolation in her ears, and promise to stand by her whatever might happen. This, needless to say, Shelley did admirably. What more, then, could a vulgar and romantic schoolgirl want ?

So, for a while, the "cause" prospered splendidly, until, in fact, Shelley gradually began to realize that Harriet was falling in love with him. Then he became greatly alarmed ; he wished he had never seen the girl ; for, although an admirable disciple, he really could not bring himself to love her ; her manner, even her particular form of prettiness, offended all his refined susceptibilities.

And yet—how very silly of him !—he had promised to stand by her, whatever might happen ! What was he to do ? Shirk his responsibilities ? That was out of the question. He could not be false to his first real convert. Nor, on the other hand, could he bring himself to marry her. Hence, hoping that absence, perhaps, would help her to forget him, he escaped from London for a while, and went to Wales, there passing the time among the mountains, meditating and writing prodigiously long letters to Miss Elizabeth Hitchener, a more recent and much more satisfactory convert, who complained that nobody understood her, and who had, therefore, a real grievance against life.

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There could be no doubt as to her sincerity. Besides, she happened to live too far away to be able to meet Shelley often, was eight years his senior, and plain. In her case, then, there seemed to be but little danger of sentiment intruding upon business. Thus Shelley felt that he could call her his "soul's sister" with impunity. And this he did; he could not help himself, for Miss Hitchener wrote charming letters which gave him infinite pleasure.

But, while he dallied thus, he did not succeed, as he had hoped he would, in freeing himself from Harriet Westbrook. Indeed, forsaken by the man whom she had thought to be her lover, she promptly went into a decline, and wrote Shelley piteous letters. Life at home, she said, had become intolerable; her father was tormenting her, and had told her that she must return to the school which Shelley's doctrines had taught her to detest. What, then, was she to do? Return to school and die? Resist her father? Commit suicide? Or, what? Let Shelley only tell her, and she would do it.

Shelley, really distressed by the girl's apparent unhappiness, forthwith wrote to Mr. Westbrook begging him to be gentler with his daughter. Mr. Westbrook, however—for already he had decided that one day he would become the father-in-law of Sir Percy Shelley, Bart.—remained obdurate. So Harriet, no doubt to her elder sister's knowledge, then wrote to Shelley, imploring him to elope with her.

This was too terrible. Shelley had no desire to be

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eloped with. Still, he felt he must do something in the matter. So, without delay, he took coach to London, intending there to talk to Mr. Westbrook seriously.

Instead, Mr. Westbrook talked seriously to him, and Harriet talked to him still more seriously. Shelley found her lying on a couch, looking pale and worn and ill, and so greatly was he perturbed by the picture of her misery that—well, he shall tell the whole story himself as he told it to Miss Hitchener.

“I arrived in London,” he wrote. “I was shocked at observing the alteration of her looks. Little did I divine its cause. She had become violently attached to me, and feared I should not return her attachment. Prejudice made the confession painful. It was impossible to avoid being much affected; I promised to unite my fate to hers. I stayed in London several days, during which she recovered her spirits. I had promised, at her bidding, to come again to London. They endeavoured to compel her to return to a school where malice and pride embittered every hour. She wrote to me. I came to London. I proposed marriage, for the reasons which I have given you, and she complied. Blame if thou wilt, dearest friend, for *still* thou art dearest to me; yet pity even this error if thou blamest me. If Harriet be not at sixteen all you are at a more advanced age, assist me to mould a really noble soul with all that can make its nobleness useful and lovely.”

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It was in August, 1811, that the young couple set out from London. They had decided to fly to Scotland. It was easier to be married there than in England. In fact, to get married in England seemed nigh impossible, for Mr. Westbrook, although quite prepared to see Harriet a titled lady, would, as Shelley knew, protest emphatically against her marrying a penniless prospective heir, at any rate until the latter had obtained some satisfactory and very definite assurance from his father.

And this, of course, never could have been obtained. Timothy Shelley, indeed, had said repeatedly that he would support illegitimate children cheerfully, but would never forgive his son should he marry a woman his inferior in rank. And Shelley, now that he had just been reconciled to his father, had no desire again to quarrel, especially for so slight a cause as Harriet, seeing that from the recent reconciliation he was still benefiting to the extent of a small, albeit very useful, quarterly allowance. Secrecy, then, was undoubtedly of great importance.

So to Scotland he and Harriet set forth. But in those days the journey was a very long one, and expensive. Shelley was hard put to find the necessary money, since it still lacked a week to quarter day, and in consequence, as perhaps is not surprising, his available resources were non-existent. Still he contrived somehow to borrow £25. That seemed ample for his immediate requirements. And so it was. At any rate, it took Harriet

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and himself so far as York in comfort. There he wrote to his friend Hogg. "We are in a slight pecuniary distress," he said. "We shall have seventy-five pounds on Sunday, until when can you send ten pounds?"

Hogg sent the money. Shelley and his bride then proceeded on their journey; and eventually arrived at Edinburgh, but arrived absolutely penniless. Undaunted by this, however—Peacock has declared in his "Memoirs" of the poet—"they took a lodging, and Shelley immediately told the landlord who they were, what they had come for and the exhaustion of their resources, and asked him if he would take them in and advance them money to get married and to carry them on till they could get a remittance. This the man agreed to do, on condition that Shelley would treat him and his friends to a supper in honour of the occasion."

Of course Shelley accepted the terms. Necessity left him no alternative. And a very cheery feast that supper must have been. The revels continued long after the bride and bridegroom had retired; in fact, far into the night, when suddenly the poet was aroused from his slumbers by a tapping on the door. He got out of bed, struck a light, and moved to the door to see who knocked. There he found the landlord confronting him, and the other guests arrayed in single file upon the staircase.

His host proceeded to explain the nature of his



PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
From the painting by Amelia Curran

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mission. "It is customary here," he said, "at weddings for the guests to come up in the middle of the night and wash the bride with whisky."

"Indeed!" remarked Shelley calmly, and the landlord nodded in a foolish, drunken manner; but when he found himself gazing down the barrels of a brace of pistols, he began to appreciate Shelley's opinion of the startling custom he had innovated. In fact he fled precipitately down the staircase, tumbling over himself and the other guests, who eventually all lay at the bottom in a confused and huddled mass.

In this way, Mr. and Mrs. Percy Shelley began their married life.

III

But that marriage—what a hideous mistake it was. How could it have ended in anything other than disaster? Not love, not even affection, it was merely a misguided altruism which had led Shelley to join himself to Harriet. In his heart he disapproved of the union most utterly, even as he disapproved of the whole system of wedlock.

Matrimony, he remarked once in a letter to Miss Hitchener, is "the most horrible of all the means which the world has had recourse to, to bind the noble to itself."

Yet Shelley married twice! So also did William Godwin, who converted him to this belief. Philosophers are not the best exponents of their own philosophies.

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But Shelley's first marriage most certainly was horrible, an act of folly which nothing can excuse ; not even the fact the joint age of bride and bridegroom was only thirty-five. None the less, that error once committed, no one can justly blame them for or wonder at the consequence. Indeed, how could so ill-mated a pair possibly have lived happily together ?

In the first place, Harriet was a very silly little girl, endowed, one must confess, with a very vulgar little heart. Of course, she cannot be held to blame for this ; it was not her fault ; it was merely Shelley's misfortune, and the tragedy lies in the fact that, despite her vulgarity, probably because of it, she tried to appear intellectual, and insisted on reading aloud to her husband, in season, out of season, even on the honeymoon, learned works which conveyed absolutely no meaning to her.

One can imagine, then, how she read them ! And, poor child, she hoped in this way to please her husband ! Instead—although, as Francis Gribble has declared, “not the least distinguishing of his characteristics was his desire to see women study”—her persistence goaded the unhappy man almost to frenzy.

Then again, the poet's penniless, adventurous existence soon lost its charm for Harriet. She made no endeavour to understand her husband, or those ideals which were his guiding principles ; if the world was content to be oppressed by tyranny, that, she maintained, was no concern of hers. On the contrary, as the

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wife of a 'gentleman,' she chose suddenly to hanker after the fleshpots of luxury, squandering Shelley's scanty earnings on jewels and rich apparel, and demanding that he should open for her the magic portals of Society and so enable her to take her place in the world as a great lady.

Now these requests must have awakened Shelley very rudely from such dreams as still he may have cherished at the time of his marriage—Shelley, the man who, mainly for Harriet's sake, had allowed himself to be ostracized by his kinsfolk in order that he might struggle to uproot those very institutions which Society held dear.

Perhaps one could almost forgive him had he been deliberately cruel to her. But this he was not. According to his own views, he did his best to provide for her wants; and to be kind to the little girl whose life he had so foolishly taken into his keeping.

Still, the fault by no means lay only on Harriet's side. Shelley, in fact, could not have been an easy man to live with, for he was quite unlike anybody other than himself, and held in contempt every single known convention. He wore ridiculous clothes in a ridiculous manner, chose to sleep when other men were awake, to work when others slept. Nor would he even eat his meals in a rational manner; he preferred to walk about in the open air, munching the bread and raisins which he carried in his pockets.

Now this sort of behaviour must have been ex-

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asperating to a girl of Harriet's temperament—a girl who aspired to pose as a “real lady,” and give extravagant banquets to her husband's high-born relatives. She hated his eccentricities.

Yet, even in spite of this, the misery of her married life might have been less utter and complete had Shelley not insisted on having his friend Hogg to live with him; and she, her elder sister, Eliza.

The latter was the real cause of all the trouble—a disagreeable, interfering, middle-aged woman, possessed of all the discordant characteristics which belong to the proverbial mother-in-law. Her presence in the house was poison to Shelley, since she spent her time alternately accusing him of carrying on a low intrigue with Elizabeth Hitchener, and Harriet, of unfaithfulness to him with Hogg. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that he should have endorsed entirely the latter's opinion of the woman.

“I had ample leisure,” Hogg wrote soon after Eliza's arrival, “to contemplate the addition to our domestic circle. She was older than I had expected, and she looked much older than she was. The lovely face was seamed with small-pox, and of a deadly white, as faces so marked and scarred commonly are; as white, indeed, as a mass of boiled rice, but of a dingy hue, like rice boiled in dirty water. The eyes were dark, but dull, and without meaning; the hair was black and glossy, but coarse; and there was the admired crop—a long crop, much like the tail of a horse—a switch-tail. The

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fine figure was meagre, prim, and constrained. The beauty, the grace, and the elegance existed, no doubt, in their utmost perfection, but only in the imagination of her partial young sister."

The society of Eliza Westbrook, thus forced upon him, must very soon have shattered Shelley's hopes of connubial bliss—and very completely. Such fine hopes too! Indeed, after his honeymoon, when he took rooms in York, at 20 Coney Street, he announced his intention of living there "for ever" with Harriet and Hogg—he wished Miss Hitchener also to join them—and aspired to spend his days presiding at an unending intellectual *séance*, at which should be considered only such subjects as the immortality of the soul, the existence of a God, and the rights of man.

It was indeed an amazing, ludicrous idea—a feast of reason in a dingy lodging-house, on an income hardly able to meet the rent, in the company of the unscrupulous Thomas Hogg and a daughter of the retired keeper of a Clapham eating-house.

Even had Miss Hitchener joined the party, instead of Harriet's sister, Shelley surely would have found himself still very, very far from his Utopia. Indeed, that even he ever should have hoped to reach it, seems utterly incredible. Still, he did hope, until of course Eliza arrived, and brought death to his ambitions.

Then he set out for Ireland, full of missionary zeal, to preach emancipation to mankind—an enterprise, incidentally, to which Miss Hitchener alone lent warm

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encouragement, but which Shelley found infinitely preferable to the society of his wife's sister.

"I certainly hate her with all my heart and soul," he once declared. "It is a sight which awakens an inexpressible sensation of disgust and horror, to see her caress my poor little Ianthe¹ in whom I may hereafter find the consolation of sympathy. I sometimes feel faint with the fatigue of checking the overflowings of my unbounded abhorrence for this miserable wretch. But she is no more than a blind and loathsome worm that cannot see to sting."

Poor Shelley—has there ever been a man so much afflicted with undesirable, unwanted relatives as he?

Under the circumstances, then, perhaps it is a matter for no small amount of wonder that he should have tolerated the atmosphere which pervaded his home circle for so long as he did, especially seeing that he had learned from his friend William Godwin, the philosopher, that the sanctity of marriage existed only while the tie of wedlock proved itself a supreme satisfaction in the lives of the two people whom it joined together.

Now this belief, lofty, no doubt, though it be in theory, in practice always proves to be, at any rate, extremely inconvenient, as even Mr. Godwin began to realize when he found Shelley contemplating a spiritual divorce such as he himself had advocated, and making love to his (Mr. Godwin's) own fair daughter.

¹ Ianthe was the first of Shelley's children by Harriet. She was born in 1813.

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Forthwith he retracted all his teaching, and sought earnestly to reconcile the Shelleys. But this could not be. Nor do I believe could any power on earth now have kept the poet and Mary Godwin long apart. If ever there have been affinities, they indeed were ; and the love they bore for one another, despite such censures as one perforce must pass upon it, in the end proved itself to be at any rate as sincere as the love of man and woman can be. .

Mary Godwin was quite a child when first she came into Shelley's life—seventeen years of age, in fact, but older in mind, beautiful, sensitive, with artistic tastes, and possessing just those traits of character which one would expect a man of the poet's temperament to have found attractive in a woman. She had acquired her father's unorthodox and liberal views on life, and had inherited from him that love for learning and philosophy which was essential to the woman who hoped for any length of time to command the respect of Shelley.

"Every one who knows me," he once told Peacock, must know that the partner of my life must be one who can feel poetry and understand philosophy. Harriet is a noble animal, but she can do neither."

Poor little Harriet !

And then again, from her step-mother, Mary had learned those very lessons which had embittered Shelley to the world, for the second Mrs. Godwin was a shrew, a tyrant who delighted in tormenting the daughter of her husband's former wife. Now, the first Mrs.

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Godwin had been none other than the brilliant Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the sweetest women who ever lived. She had died in giving birth to Mary. And Mary adored her mother's memory; it remained with her always the most pure and sacred influence on her life, giving her that wistful melancholy which appealed so irresistibly to Shelley.

She and the young poet often used to meet in the twilight by her mother's graveside in Old St. Pancras Churchyard—it was a quiet, peaceful spot in those days, though now it is a slum through which a railway makes its way amid the roar and dirt of a great city—and there sit talking; not of love; they were not lovers yet, these children; they were bound merely by a boy-and-girl companionship of mutual understanding, for Shelley, be it remembered, although a married man, was still a child in mind. Such he always remained. He and Mary, then, would talk of philosophy and poetry, and lament together all the sin and ugliness which marred the fair beauty of God's beauteous world. They were both very young. And Shelley still had ideals.

All this happened in the spring and summer of 1814. Mr. Godwin, it would seem, was then passing through one of his frequent financial crises, and Shelley, ever generous, had undertaken to try to help him. This, of course, made it necessary for him to go to London. And to London he went, leaving Harriet in the country. She, therefore, knew nothing of his doings.

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But in London, attracted by the person of Mr. Godwin's daughter, Shelley tarried no doubt overlong. Meanwhile his friendship with Mary Godwin grew and ripened. His friendship—Shelley did not purpose ever to make it more, until one day, distressed at hearing fresh news of Mrs. Godwin's tyrannies, he, too, unburdened his mind of its great discontent, and begged Mary to come and live with him. He saw no reason against such a proposal; and was quite astonished, or admirably feigned astonishment, at the objections raised by Mr. Godwin; still more astonished at Mrs. Shelley's protests.

Intolerance again! Was it impossible for men and women to live in the world as they wished to live? Shelley could not, would not, see that it was impossible; how futile was his struggle against the mandates of society.

But hatred of intolerance came now to him and Mary like a serpent showing them where grew the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They loved one another. They realized it now; and they loved with a love which could not be strangled simply in obedience to the orders of convention. And they would not strangle that love. So Shelley said. Mary Godwin was unhappy; he was unhappy. They would go away together then. He wanted her. He insisted.

Then—exactly what happened it is impossible to say. Did Harriet leave Shelley? Did Shelley leave Harriet? Biographers differ. Indeed, the whole

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history of these events¹ is shrouded deep in mystery ; and Mary, who alone, perhaps, could have thrown light upon it, declined to do so.

“This is not the time to tell the truth,” she wrote, by way of preface in her edition of the poet’s works, “and I should reject any colouring of the truth. No account of those events has ever been given at all approaching reality in their details either as regards himself or others ; nor shall I further allude to them than to remark that the errors of action committed by a man as noble and generous as Shelley was, as far as he only is concerned, may be fearlessly avowed by those who loved him, in the firm conviction that, were they judged impartially, his character would stand in brighter and fairer light than that of any contemporary.”

One must be content, therefore, merely with conjecture. But one fact, the important fact, is indisputable.

Some time in 1814 Harriet and Shelley separated, and soon afterwards the poet fled to France with Mary Godwin.

And with them went that little imp of mischief, Mary’s half-sister, Jane Clairmont. The latter insisted on accompanying them. Apparently she made it the price of her connivance ; and Mary encouraged the idea, maybe because she was woman enough to think

¹ In justification of Shelley’s action, it has often been maintained that he was goaded on by his wife’s unfaithfulness. But the evidence is quite insufficient.

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Jane's presence would mitigate the outrage she herself was about to commit against propriety.

Thus, at the age of twenty-two, Shelley, a married man, found himself in France in the company of one woman whom he could not marry and another woman who could not be his sister-in-law, for the very reason that the other could not be his wife !

The situation surely is unique, one in which Shelley, ever the plaything of eccentric fate, only could have found himself.

IV

Now Mary, although only seventeen years of age, was a woman of the world. She knew well what she was doing when she ran away with Shelley ; knew what the result must be. But she loved the man, and because she felt herself to be his proper complement, cheerfully faced the future, confident that she had acted rightly.

And surely she justified her action. In spite of all, the story of the eight years which lay still before her and Shelley is a love idyll as unassailable as any that ever has been told in prose or verse. And those were not happy years as the world gauges happiness. In turn, every form of affliction, of poverty, sickness, and distress, assailed the lovers. Yet their love proved stronger than all those things, and at last led them to the haven which they sought.

Shelley had made a failure of his life. He began to see it now, at the age of twenty-two ; began to see that

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he never could regain the place proper to him, which he had lost in the esteem of his fellow-men. So he sought to escape from them, and to hide from the world. And escape he did. And Mary went with him, to comfort him in his retreat.

Nor—though he failed utterly to appreciate its magnitude—was he unmindful of this, the self-sacrifice she made on his behalf ; ~~the~~, ~~the~~ woman who worshipped him, and in whose society he changed from an agnostic, oppressed by the bitterness and cruelty of the world, into the bard who sang rapturous songs in honour of his God, the perfect poet of beauty, love, and joy.

And he loved Mary the more for her unselfishness.

“How beautiful and calm and free thou wert
In thy young wisdom, when the mortal chain
Of Custom thou didst burst and rend in twain,
And walk as free as light the clouds among.

* * * *

“No more alone through the world's wilderness,
Although I trod the paths of high intent,
I journeyed now.”

But before this day came, there were many difficulties to be faced and overcome. When he fled from England, Shelley had made absolutely no provision for the future ; nor had he any money either due to him or in his pocket.

True, his watch realized £8 5s. and he contrived somehow to borrow £60 in Paris. Still, under the most favourable circumstances, to travel with two ladies on the Continent is not a cheap amusement. This

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Shelley very soon discovered. Perhaps then it was not surprising that, before they had been away long, he, Jane, and Mary should have been forced to return home with unseemly haste to that very England which, when they left it, they declared they would never see again.

After numerous adventures they arrived at Gravesend towards the end of August, moreover, without even a cab fare in their pockets. None the less they took a cab, and drove round London until they could find a landlady prepared to give them lodgings and long credit. This done, Shelley continued to drive until he could find a cab fare. He was compelled eventually to borrow it from Harriet. Then he returned to the lodgings.

And there during the next few months, Jane, Mary, and himself had more than ample leisure to repent their hasty action and contemplate the stern realities of life, for, in addition to the taunts of friends and relatives, the most dire poverty afflicted them. Indeed, often they were forced literally to beg their daily bread in order to solve the most elementary problem of existence, and, at that time, they had very few friends from whom to beg.

Life, therefore, soon resolved itself into a game of hide-and-seek with brokers' men and bailiffs. And this at the time when Mary was expecting the birth of her first child! Surely even the humour of the situation could scarcely have relieved its sordid tragedy.

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What would have happened ultimately it is impossible to imagine, had Shelley not been Shelley. But, being Shelley and therefore quite irresponsible, Fate took compassion on him. In short, early in January, 1815, his grandfather died, leaving him a parcel of land which his father, who now succeeded to the baronetcy, took from him in return for the payment of all his debts and an annual allowance of £1000.

This, of course, solved immediately and for ever the poet's financial difficulties. But it did not bring all his troubles to an end. On the contrary, worse ones were still to come. . . .

It was only when Shelley had gone from her that Harriet fully realized the greatness of her loss; of how much she had robbed herself by her callous intolerance. And it was too late then for vain regrets. She had already chosen her path and left herself with no alternative other than to follow it. Shelley asked her to return to him. But this she could not do. Live with her husband and the woman who had supplanted her in his favour—of course she could not; pride forbade her. So, for a while she tried to lead an idle life of pleasure, dallying in tawdry gaiety; and Shelley—this at least stands to his credit—provided her with every penny he could spare for her to squander.

But Harriet had not the temperament of a bad woman, nor the charm necessary to an adventuress. The world had dealt very cruelly with her, and now, so it seemed, had nothing more to offer. She was

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not one of those women able to soar above the meanness of adverse circumstance. And so at last, betrayed by her follies, she allowed despair to enter her soul, and in the early hours of the morning of November 9, 1816, drowned herself and all her sorrows in the waters of the Serpentine.

For some weeks her disappearance remained a mystery; nobody, not even her parents, knew what had become of her, until, on December 12, a paragraph in "The Times" at last made known the truth :—

"On Tuesday a respectable female, far advanced in pregnancy, was taken out of the Serpentine River and brought to her residence in Queen Street, Brompton, having been missing nearly six weeks. She had a valuable ring on her finger. A want of honour in her own conduct is supposed to have led to this fatal catastrophe, her husband being abroad."

But her husband was not abroad. Shelley, in fact, was at Bath when he heard of the tragedy, and the news shocked him profoundly. Forthwith he hastened to London to attend the funeral, though still he declared his feelings to be those only of sorrow, not of remorse. He denied that he had been in any way the cause of Harriet's death.

Yet posterity, I think, may, in turn, deny his denial, for the picture of his first wife's hideous end remained in his mind, poignant and vivid till his death. "It was," wrote Leigh Hunt, "a heavy blow to him, and he never forgot it." Whilst even Peacock, Harriet's friend, de-

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clared that "her untimely fate occasioned him deep agony of mind, which he felt the more because for a long time he kept the feeling to himself," adding that he then determined to "take a great glass of ale every night."

"I shall do it," he said, "to deaden my feelings."

The death of little Harriet, however, made it possible for Shelley now to take Mary Godwin as his wife. This he did six weeks later. Then, repudiated by his relations, scorned by the world as the murderer of his wife, forbidden in the Law Courts ever again to be a father to her children, he set out for Italy with the one woman in the world who really understood him.

And there, despite his misfortunes, despite those periods of melancholy which darkened his later years, he lived a life of perfect happiness, free and untrammelled from the follies of the past. Amid sunshine and sublimest of Italian scenery, the old Shelley ceased to exist; a new one came into being; a Shelley who, in the company only of those who understood and were able to appreciate him as the genius which he was, soared to the dizzy heights of poesy, exemplifying to the full the truth of his own lines:—

"Most wretched men
Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

And Mary—she too found happiness in Italy, though hers—and how could it have been otherwise?—was a happiness tinged both with sorrows and regret.

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Much has been written about Mary Shelley's lofty soul and poetic aspirations, but most of it is gross exaggeration. The author of "Frankenstein," though cultured and appreciative of art, was not herself a genius; she was merely a middle-class English woman who, though content with lesser things than Harriet, found the wild Bohemianism of her husband's life utterly distasteful. She had no wish to escape from the world and bury herself in the solitude of oblivion. On the contrary, although she never dared admit it, the one thing she desired was to reinstate herself in Mrs. Grundy's favour; and she hankered ever longingly for those tea-parties and other conventional monotones, so dear to women of her class, which were denied to her in Italy.

Shelley, of course, could have moved in any social circle that he wished; could have become, in fact, a leader of fashion, as Byron did, for a man with his name and his reputation would have been regarded as an acquisition by any English community—on the Continent. And, no doubt, had he taken the trouble to do so, he could have opened the doors of the most exclusive houses also to his wife. But this he would not do; deliberately he shunned society as a something evil.* And on her own merits only, Mary, a tradesman's daughter, who had been her husband's mistress before she became his wife, could not be received, save only by such people as Shelley chose to know, Trelawny's friends and the intimates of Byron.

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They were people, very few of whom paid much heed to the conventions.

And then there was Jane Clairmont—she proved herself a sorry trial to Mary, not only on account of her blatant indiscretions and seeming disregard for all morality, but because of her relationship with Shelley. Mary could not convince herself as to its innocence, suspicions harassed her, for, in matters of the heart, she knew her step-sister to be as reckless as she was irresponsible.

Besides, there were other women too—Jane Williams, for example, Emilia Viviani, and the fair unknown who followed the author of "Queen Mab" from England, and died at Naples of a broken heart, because her love still remained unrequited.

This was the second cause of Mary's sorrow—that green-eyed monster, jealousy.

Still, there is another side to the picture.

"My greatest content," Shelley once wrote, and at a time, moreover, when Mary's baseless fears were most acute, "would be utterly to desert all human society. I would retire with you and our child to a solitary island in the sea, and shut upon my retreat the flood gates of the world. I would read no reviews and talk with no authors. If I dared trust my imagination, it would tell me there are one or two chosen companions besides yourself whom I should desire. But to this I would not listen—where two or three are gathered together, the devil is among them. And

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good, far more than evil, impulses, love, far more than hatred, has been to me, except as you have been its object, the source of all sorts of mischief."

And those were not idle words ; Shelley meant them, every one of them, and did earnestly wish to seek now a retreat still more sequestered, and thither to escape alone with the woman whom he recognized as his good genius, the only woman he had ever really loved, the woman who had saved him from himself. But, because he loved her, he restrained the wish.

"Poor Mary ! hers is a sad fate," he told Trelawny. "Come along ; she can't bear solitude, nor I society—the quick coupled with the dead."

In some measure, then, at least, he realized the greatness of her sacrifice, and, by showering upon her treasures from his boundless store of love, did what he could to compensate her for it. And it was in that love that Mary found her happiness. Though how much more she might have found she did not know till Shelley left her never to return ; then, only then, when it already was too late, when death had claimed him, there dawned within her the consciousness of her own failings.

And that consciousness it was which made her write :—

"Oh, gentle Spirit, thou hast often sung
How fallen on evil days thy heart was wrung ;
Now fierce remorse and unreplying death
Waken a chord within my heart, whose breath,

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Thrilling and keen, in accents audible
A tale of unrequited love doth tell.
It was not anger—while thy earthly dress
Encompassed still thy soul's rare loveliness,
All anger was atoned by many a kind
Caress and tear, that spoke the softened mind—
It speaks of cold neglect, averted eyes,
That blindly crushed the soul's fond sacrifice ;
My heart was all thine own—but yet a shell
Closed in its core, which seemed impenetrable,
Till sharp-toothed misery tore the husk in twain,
Which gaping lies, nor may unite again.
Forgive me ! ”

It was in 1822 that Shelley met his tragic end. He was returning from Leghorn, whither he had gone one day to meet Leigh Hunt, across Spezzia Bay in a small boat alone with Captain Williams to his house, the Casa Magni at Lerici. Trelawny had intended to accompany him part of the way in Byron's yacht, but at the last minute was prevented. The small boat, therefore, set out alone, Trelawny watching its progress from the yacht, conversing meanwhile with the mate. The boat was carrying too much sail, the latter said ; unless Williams and Shelley were more careful they would find themselves in difficulty.

Hardly had he spoken when his fears were realized. The storm burst suddenly. Exactly what happened to the boat the watchers could not see, for soon it was lost from view in fog ; and, when at length the fog had cleared, it had vanished utterly from sight.

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Nor were its luckless crew heard of, or seen again, until a few days later, when, after a period of hideous suspense for those who loved them, their mangled bodies were washed ashore on the land which now had long been Shelley's home, the land of his adoption.

He was only thirty years of age when thus he died. Mary survived him many, many years, but during those years her devotion to his memory never wavered once ; time only strengthened it.

"Do you think that I shall ever marry?" she wrote to Trelawny some time after her husband's death. "Never—neither you nor anybody else. Mary Shelley shall be written on my tomb—and why? I cannot tell, except that it is so pretty a name that, though I were to preach to myself for years, I should never have the heart to get rid of it."

And, maybe, there were other reasons.

**The Tragedy of Queen Natalie
of Servia**

III

THE TRAGEDY OF QUEEN NATALIE OF SERVIA

I

I LOVE my Servians, and my Servians love me—they will never betray me," Prince Michael once affirmed. Nor was this merely a vain, idle boast. Rarely, indeed, has a ruler been more popular among his people than was he. But a Prince, especially be he the ruler of a Balkan State, should place his trust in something stronger than the blind devotion of his subjects, for it is possible to be loved and still to have many enemies. In the Near East, in fact, if the former is the case, the latter almost invariably is so.

Now Prince Michael's enemies not only were numerous but also powerful. And one man in particular, Alexander Karageorgovitch, hated him with all the intensity of his nature. Prince Michael belonged to the House of Obrenovitch; Alexander to a rival family whose dynastic hopes, though temporarily thwarted, still were very strong. He was an enemy, therefore, such as no ruler safely can ignore, for he aspired, and aspired openly, to seize his rival's throne, and to establish himself upon it

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in his stead. But Prince Michael, heedless to those intentions, blind to the gathering clouds of treachery, sunned himself contentedly in the adulation of his people.

And in doing so he greatly erred.

One day, in June, 1869, while walking with three ladies in the park of Topfschider, his favourite summer residence, unaccompanied, save only by a footman and an aide-de-camp, he was met by three men walking together in the opposite direction. As they passed, the men saluted the Prince respectfully and loyally.

He returned the greeting in that gracious manner which had done more than aught else to win for him his subjects' love. Then he moved on. But, before he had advanced many paces, the sound of pistol-shots disturbed the stillness of the summer morning. His companion stepped aside in horror. For there, stretched out upon the ground between them, lay Prince Michael shot foully through the back—dead.

Now the people were not slow to believe that Alexander Karageorgovitch had been the instigator of this crime; and, whether suspicion was justified or not, their love for the murdered Prince burst forth in a furious flame of loyalty, which soon extinguished Alexander's hopes. His was but a short-lived triumph. The Servians, in fact, rallied round his rival's rightful heir, as, under normal circumstances, they never would have done, for Milan Obrenovitch was only a cousin to their beloved Prince, and at that a mere boy, fourteen years of age.

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For a long while indeed, Prince Michael had despaired of finding an heir to the throne in his own family, for he himself was childless. Then, not long before his death, he suddenly remembered that his Uncle Jefrenn had married a certain Marie Catargo, and that she had given him a son. Jefrenn Obrenovitch was dead. But where ~~was~~ the boy? Eventually he was found at Bucharest. And his mother, who was leading a licentious, gay and worthless life at the Court of Prince Kursa, declared herself only too glad to have the opportunity of shuffling her parental obligations on to the shoulders of another.

Forthwith she sent her son to Belgrade, and ventured to express the hope that her nephew would be pleased with his appearance. Nor was her sarcasm unjustified or wasted. Indeed, it would have been hard to find, even in the gutters of Belgrade, a wilder, more unkempt little ragamuffin than was Milan. He could not read; he could not write. He had never been in Servia before. The language was unknown to him. He had no manners, and apparently no virtues. Prince Michael was almost in despair. Was this boy the only heir to the throne that could be found? The thought was not encouraging.

Still, Milan's father had been an Obrenovitch. There must, then, be some good in the child, his cousin thought. Accordingly he set about to find it. Nor did he fail. As a matter of fact, there was plenty of good in Milan. Decent food, decent clothes, and

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a decent education soon worked a miracle, and Milan, in an incredibly short space of time, ceased to be a hooligan, and developed into a real little gentleman and a rare little sportsman. He showed himself quick to learn, and willing; but in one subject—the art of war—he refused to take interest. This failing worried his tutors, for Servia was a troubled State, and her ruler, *ipso facto*, leader of the army; it was essential, then, for him to be a soldier. But Prince Michael, for his part, still had hopes; the boy, he felt, even yet would learn.

And so, “I am proud of my successor,” he once declared; “I shall leave my kingdom and my people in good hands.”

And, a few days later, he left them. The treachery of the assassin had made Milan, at the age of fourteen, Prince of Servia.

Now surely, no boy has ever been allowed to gather the reins of power into his hands under sadder and, at the same time, happier auspices. Servia lost all sense of proportion in paying homage to him. Prince Michael had chosen him to be his heir. That alone was enough to fan enthusiasm. Whenever he showed himself in public, the new Prince was hailed with mad, intoxicating cheers. The Court adored him. The great officers of State were prepared to sacrifice in his service their very all. The Ministers were loyalty itself. But the people—the people regarded their Prince as but little other than a god. ~

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Such acclamations of loyalty and devotion might well have turned a saner, older head than Milan's. And Ristisch, Servia's most trusty statesman, was not slow to recognize the danger to which the Prince was now exposed. * Flattery he knew to be an insidious drug ; so he resolved that, during the days of the Regency, not only must Milan's education be allowed to continue as strictly as before, but also that the boy must escape for a while from Servia and evil influences ; that he must travel, and so see the world and gain experience. This, no doubt, was wise and salutary counsel ; but, when choosing a tutor for his charge, Ristisch failed to display a similar wisdom.

Professor Huet may have been a clever man, nay, was ; and a congenial companion. But Milan needed more than this ; he needed as tutor some one able to keep a firm hand upon him. This Huet could not do. Education, therefore, defeated its own object. Milan, in fact, as a result of his visits to the capitals of Europe, learned more of the subtleties of pleasure and the gentle art of spending money than of statesmanship. This, of course, was the very thing to be avoided. His father, it is true, had been an Obrenovitch, but his mother—well, his mother was Marie Catargo ; and heredity is not a factor in human life to be despised.

After his return to the Court of Belgrade, then, the Prince gave many anxious moments to those who wished him well. Youthful indiscretions, perhaps, are pardonable. But there is a limit to such toleration. And all

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is not well when a man, whose function in life is to lead others, places pleasure before duty, and allows selfishness to master his better judgment.

It would be unjust, of course, to blame Milan entirely for his follies. He had been led astray by flattery and opportunity, two vicious harpies into whose hands it is only too easy for a prince to fall, a young and handsome prince with a romantic past. Still, neither excuse nor justification can lessen the gravity of any danger. And the danger which threatened Milan was a very real one, and so acute that his advisers deemed it necessary to take immediate action to avert it.

But what? What remedy could be found? Only one, it would seem, was possible. Milan must have a wife, a wife whom he would love and reverence, and who could turn his eyes from the fickle beauties of his Court; a wife, moreover, whom the Servians, too, would love, and who could share their devotion to her husband. Yes, this certainly was the ideal solution to the problem. Besides, it might also provide, perhaps, an answer to the ever-present question of the succession.

Ristich, therefore, strongly urged the Prince to marry. And Milan, for his part, liked the idea. The thought of having a queen to share his throne pleased him. He was all eagerness. But unfortunately he was destined soon to discover that it is no easy matter to find a suitable bride for a prince whose throne is set on quicksand; and that in the *Almanach de Gotha* mention

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is made of crowns esteemed more highly in the matrimonial market than those of Balkan States.

This proved a sorry blow to his dignity. And when, after *pourparlers* of phenomenal duration, a mere Hungarian count rejected him as a husband for his daughter in favour of a man who had no claim to distinction other than a very short purse and a very long pedigree, Milan would have no more to do with bride-hunting. Mere mention of the word marriage in his presence was more than he would tolerate.

And so for a while he continued to pursue the uneven tenor of his way, until one day he happened to notice a portrait lying on Ristisch's writing-table—the portrait of a girl, and a very lovely girl. The Prince's curiosity was aroused immediately, and he made inquiry as to who she was. Ristisch laughed; and then, since he had been given the cue, ventured again to introduce the forbidden topic.

The girl, he said, was a Russian, and of very ancient lineage. In fact, he hinted, she would make a highly desirable *parti* for the Prince. She was young and rich—yes, very rich. Her father, moreover, possessed great political influence. And an alliance with Russia would . . .

II

But Milan paid no heed to these particulars. He had forgotten even Ristisch's presence. The beauty of the girl's portrait had absorbed completely the attention

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both of his senses and his eyes. Could the original be anything like so lovely? Was it possible? He must see her immediately. Where could he find her?

At present, Ristisch told him, she was to be found in Paris. She had gone there to finish her education, and was staying with her aunt, Princess Mussuri.

Paris! Princess Mussuri! That was enough for Milan. He decided to leave for France immediately; and forthwith sat down and wrote to the Princess announcing his intention. At last he really was in love—head over heels in love. It was no mere *mariage de convenance* that he contemplated now, but romance, the real thing, an undying devotion—Love.

Under the circumstances, then, perhaps it is not surprising that he should have arrived at Paris several hours earlier than he had intended, or even had thought possible. He had told the Princess that he would present himself at her house at midday. He arrived at Paris at four o'clock in the morning. What could he do with himself in the meanwhile? How could he kill time? He was all impatience.

Then suddenly he remembered that he had a cousin at the Servian Consulate, one Alexander Konstantinovitch, whom he had not seen for a long time. He decided, therefore, to disturb him now, for, he thought, he might be able perhaps there to glean some information. And he found Alexander only too ready to gossip. The latter, in fact, also was a love-sick swain;

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and could neither talk nor think of anything save the great passion which was consuming him.

Now this humour suited Milan's mood, and he listened patiently to a recital of the unknown lady's charms. She was only sixteen years of age, it appeared, but lovely, adorable, a dream of all the graces, and, incidentally, the daughter of a Russian colonel.

No, Konstantinovitch said, he was not actually engaged to her, but. . . Then he gave a significant shrug of the shoulders which, translated into plain English, meant "all but." He had an appointment with her, he said, at ten o'clock that morning. Would the Prince accompany him? The lady in question was really anxious to meet him; she had said so often.

Indeed—of course, Konstantinovitch did not realize this, for infatuation had blinded his senses—she had heard so much of Milan from her ardent wooer that she had almost learned to love him. Konstantinovitch, in fact, solely from egotistic motives, merely in order to enhance his own importance, had laid much stress upon his connection with that darling of society, the boy Prince of Servia, who had not only won the hearts of his own subjects, but had set those of the *beau monde* of Paris and Vienna in a flutter.

But of this interesting little fact, Milan, needless to say, was kept in ignorance. So he set out with his cousin, not suspecting for a moment whither he was going. He wanted merely to kill time. And what more attractive method could be found of doing so

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than an adventure, especially an adventure in which a woman was concerned?

On arriving at the house, he and Konstantinovitch were shown into the drawing-room. There they were kept waiting for a few minutes. Presently an elderly lady entered; and Milan, following his cousin's example, rose to greet her. To his astonishment, he found himself being presented to the Princess Mussuri.

What was happening? His mind was in confusion. And before he could collect his thoughts or find his bearings, the door again opened, and a girl entered the room, the girl whose portrait Milan had found lying on Ristich's table!

But the original was a thousandfold more adorable than the reproduction. Her eyes, they were expressive of a thousand moods, and their colour, like the messages they flashed, changed in lightning succession. Her manner was the manner of a queen. Her 'skin, it put to shame both the painter's and the sculptor's art. Indeed, her mouth alone seemed to mar the perfection of her beauty. Even it had a reason; it was made for laughter. No other woman surely had such a smile. Milan, at any rate, it bewitched; and for a while he stood gazing at the goddess before him in speechless wonderment. Then he was dimly conscious that he was being introduced to her.

" . . . the Princess's niece, Natalie Ketschko, my affianced bride." What was Konstantinovitch saying? What did he mean? The words brought Milan's

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senses suddenly to earth again. Could this be true? Was he to be robbed of the woman of his dreams so soon as he had found her? The tension in his mind was terrible. Then something snapped, and joy flooded his heart. The Princess was speaking.

"I think you are mistaken, Monsieur Konstantinovitch," she said; "my niece is not engaged to you."

And Konstantinovitch, thoroughly abashed, had no alternative other than to pay the penalty of his foolish indiscretion, and retire. Milan did not accompany him. He remained; he remained all day, and in the evening the Princess entertained him at dinner.

That was the sweetest day in all his life; and, when eventually he left the house, Prince Milan walked on air, for Natalie had promised not only to share his throne with him, but also to share his life; never before had he realized as then the infinite possibilities of love. The Princess, moreover, had informed him—and this would spell joy to Ristich—that her niece's *dot*, five million roubles, would be handed over to him on his wedding-day.

This did spell joy to Ristich; he was unsparing with congratulations, as also were Milan's other ministers. And the Prince was wildly happy. Nowhere in the sky of the future could a cloud be seen. For once love and wisdom seemed to be really in agreement.

Now the news of the engagement spread like fire. Serbia it delighted, for report had made the charms of Natalie Ketschko, the idol of the *jeunesse dorée* of the

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day, well known even in those unfrequented parts. Europe overwhelmed the happy couple with congratulations. But Paris—Paris went mad. So romantic an attachment appealed irresistibly to the Frenchman. Even the beggars in the streets showered blessings on the happy couple when they showed themselves in public.

And to Natalie this new-found love came as the consummation of all happiness. For two things she had longed throughout her life, romance and power. Now she seemed to have found both, and, what is more, to be fulfilling her destiny.

Once, many years before, a gipsy woman had met her, walking in the grounds of her father's house near Moscow. For a moment the old hag gazed curiously into the child's face. Then suddenly she threw herself upon the ground, reverently kissing her feet and the hem of her frock.

"Why do you do that?" asked Natalie.

"Because," said the gipsy, "I salute the chosen bride of a great lord. A crown hangs above your head, my child. Slowly it descends—lower, and lower, and lower. Ah, it touches your head. A great brilliance surrounds it. It is a royal diadem."

"Tell me more! Tell me more!" cried Natalie, clapping her hands together, eager with excitement.

But for a while the gipsy was silent. Then she continued:—

"You will be the mother of a royal race. You . . ."

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"A royal race! I—the mother!" gasped Natalie; then she laughed.]

At the time she had thought the gipsy mad. But now, so it seemed, the prophecy was coming true. The gipsy, however, had said more. She had foreseen trouble in the future. She had told the child that one day she would be driven from her throne, and that in the end she would find herself face to face with misery, disgrace, and tragedy.

But these ill-omened words had been forgotten. They lay buried beneath the joys of the present. Natalie had youth. She had beauty. She had love. What more could a girl desire? And soon she was to become Princess. Princess Natalie—it is a pretty name. To the feminine heart there must have been something infinitely attractive in the title.

But to Milan she was already more than a princess; more even than a queen. And he lavished upon her all that a lover has to offer, promises, pleasure, jewels, and those thousand small attentions which, perhaps, are valued most of all. In her, moreover, he confided all his secrets, his hopes, ambitions, aims; he told her what he had been, what he could be, and what he would be, now that he had won her. It was an ideal courtship. And the wedding should be worthy of it. It must stand unmatched for brilliance. On this point Milan was determined; not even the best was good enough for Natalie; and he spared neither pains nor money in making the arrangements.

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For various reasons, diplomatic and other, it was decided that the ceremony should be performed at Vienna; and the date agreed to was October 17, 1875. But as the fateful day drew near, Milan was destined to receive a rude rebuff. No royalties, it was found, could attend the ceremony, nor could they send even representatives. Inflexible rules govern the actions of monarchs and their courtiers, and marriages such as this are not classed as being worthy of official recognition.

A similar slight even Napoleon III was forced to endure. But Milan bitterly resented that inflicted upon him. It was an indignity to his bride, he felt; and for a while disappointment clouded his happiness, leaving him strangely troubled. Why, he could not understand, but, for some reason, an indefinable foreboding seemed to prey upon him, a foreboding wholly out of proportion to its cause.

And then, a few days before the wedding, a very curious incident occurred. Just as the Prince was leaving the house where Natalie was staying, an elderly woman accosted him.

"What do you want with me, Madame?" he inquired courteously.

"A few words with Your Highness," was the reply.

The Prince started. "Then you know me?"

"By sight, very well," said the woman. "I am in the service of Princess Mussuri, and I have known Natalie since she was a child. I implore you not to marry her."

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"But why?"

"Why? Because nothing but misery can come of such a union. You like to rule; so does Natalie. And what is more, she will rule. Be warned, therefore—and in time."

But Milan merely laughed, and went his way. When one cannot oneself read the future, it is hard to believe that others can. In after years the Prince remembered the woman's words, then he was sorry he had not heeded them.

III

October 17, 1875. Vienna awoke very early in the morning. Sightseers flocked into the city, every one agog with eagerness to see Prince Milan and his chosen bride, the fame of whose beauty was spread broadcast. By nine o'clock in the morning the streets were packed with people. In the Leopold Strasse—at any rate in the neighbourhood of the "Weisse Lamm," the hotel at which the Prince had arranged to receive his guests—so dense was the throng that all traffic had to be suspended. And there, throughout the morning, the crowd waited eager and expectant.

At last the clocks of the city boomed the hour of twelve. The great moment had come. Thousands of anxious necks craned forward. Thousands of eyes riveted their gaze in the direction of the hotel.

Then, before yet the clocks had finished chiming, punctual to the moment, the carriages—the Imperial

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carriages which the Emperor Francis Joseph had placed at the disposal of the Prince and his consort—came clattering along the street.

In the first, by the side of her aunt, Princess Mussuri, sat Natalie, a vision of loveliness, clad in a simple wedding-dress of satin. And, as she drove past, the crowd cheered and cheered until they made the very walls of Vienna to echo and re-echo their enthusiasm. Even rumour, it seemed, had not done justice to her beauty. But Natalie, it may be, never before had appeared so beautiful, for she was driving then not only to meet the husband of her choice and the hero of her dreams, but to be made a princess, to become Princess Natalie. No wonder she was radiant with happiness.

And he, her hero, followed in the second carriage with his mother. That the latter should have been present is perhaps remarkable, for but little affection existed between mother and son; and there was but little reason for affection. In fact, they had seen each other only once since the day when Prince Michael had rescued his heir from the mother's charge, and brought him to Belgrade; and at that meeting—it took place in Paris—they had avowedly repudiated one another.

None the less, in asking his mother to attend the wedding, Milan did wisely. It was one of those little acts of statesmanship which marked him early as a prince of promise, and which render his subsequent failure the more difficult to understand. A true

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respect for the Fifth Commandment is a national characteristic of the Servian people. Milan knew this ; and so saw that anything in the shape of a public reconciliation with his mother would do much to win for him the favour of his subjects.

But perhaps also he himself sincerely desired such a reconciliation, for at this time countless good resolutions inspired him, and he solemnly renounced his youthful indiscretions, swearing to himself henceforth to live solely for the welfare of his subjects and the happiness of Natalie. On this day, then, his wedding-day, the day of days, no discordant note must be struck.

Nor indeed was there. The ceremony was all it could have been and should have been ; impressive but simple, sincere but dignified. And the reception accorded in the streets, was it not a splendid augury for the future ? Milan could not conceal his emotion.

"I wish," he said, when thanking his guests for their good wishes and congratulations, "that every one of my subjects as well as every one I know could be as happy as I am at this moment." That was all. Then he drove away with Natalie. And surely never have a bridal pair set forth under fairer auspices. They were both young, both popular, and they loved each other dearly. The subsequent and awful *débâcle* not even the most inveterate cynic could have dared predict.

A house at Joanka had been lent to the newly-married couple for their honeymoon, and there they

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passed an ideal time, three weeks of joyous irresponsibility, of freedom from all cares of State, and from the glare of the limelight which inevitably shines upon a throne, be it only that of a small Balkan State. Yet even the return to Belgrade was not without its compensations. Vienna had cheered; Belgrade went mad. A wonderful welcome was extended to the Prince and his consort. The festivities lasted three whole days. But it was during the drive to the palace through the streets of his capital that Milan lived the proudest moments in his life, and Natalie both the proudest and the happiest.

Then the palace doors closed upon them. The new life really had begun. And perhaps it was well that neither Natalie nor her husband then could read the future, for already in the far, far distance, barely perceptible above the horizon had appeared that cloud, at present no bigger than a man's hand, which ultimately was destined not only to darken the sky of their happiness, but indeed to wreck their lives.

"You will rule; Natalie will rule," the bride's old nurse once had said to Milan. "I implore you not to marry her." At the time the Prince had laughed. What did this old woman know of love? "Nothing but misery can result from the union," she had declared. Why, the mere thought of such a catastrophe had seemed ridiculous.

But now—Milan knew not what to think. His wife seemed to be a woman strangely different from the

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fascinating girl whom he had learned to love. He could not understand the change ; it puzzled him. He had hoped to look to Natalie for help, advice, and sympathy ; but instead, he found only determined opposition.

And between two opposing wills even love can be stifled.

The position of consort, it would seem, soon lost its attractiveness for Natalie. Born a Russian, trained in an autocratic school, she thirsted for power, for the power which right had invested in her husband, and, what is more, she was determined to have it. At first, perhaps, Milan may have admired her pluck and spirit. Indeed, while under the spell of a new, absorbing passion, he did his utmost to humour her little whims and fancies, for he loved her dearly and was very proud of her. But the end was inevitable. Sovereignty is not a power that can be divided.

And tact, the strongest of human virtues, was a force unknown to Natalie. Self-willed and impulsive, she could not bring herself to be content merely with influencing her husband and his ministers ; instead, she tried to ride rough-shod over opposition. Quarrels, therefore, between herself and Milan soon became events of daily occurrence, and, as time went on, they increased in violence. Now these quarrels not only jeopardized her own happiness and the Prince's, but also were a real menace to the welfare of the country.

In the first place, there were at Court many persons,

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especially women, who hated Natalie. Her presence, and Milan's devotion to her, robbed them directly of favours with which once he had honoured them. They delighted, therefore, in trying to poison her mind against him by telling exaggerated stories of what Court life once had been. And Natalie listened to these stories, even believed them. Her idol, too, had feet of clay. It was to this bitter fact that she awoke from the sweet illusion of her childish dreams. Then a new barrier sprang up between husband and wife—jealousy. And jealousy, like ivy, when once planted, grows apace. Nothing can stay it.

Secondly, from a political point of view, these quarrels were of very grave importance. With the Prince ruling at the head of one faction and his consort at the head of another, the machinery of State needed constant adjustment, and gave cause for much anxiety.

The cloud had rolled nearer—much nearer. Not yet, however, did it burst. The sun of triumph still shone brightly above the palace. These were the halcyon-days of Milan's reign, the most glorious perhaps in all the history of Servia. They mark an era of organization, progress, and reform. Plenty and prosperity flourished everywhere. Belgrade grew apace, and became a city worthy of taking rank among the towns of Europe. And then, in 1882, came the crowning triumph. The Powers recognized Servia as a kingdom. This was Milan's reward for the consummate skill with which he conducted his great war against the Turks.

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And it was the very reward he wanted, the epitome of his aims.

To Natalie, also, this came as the sweetest of happenings. Now she was a queen, and, amid the joys of the present, readily forgot the disappointments of the past. The future once again seemed rich with promises of hope. And, in the happy moments of a new-found greatness, she strove hard to blot out her former errors, promising thenceforth to work in one accord with Milan to prepare a heritage for her son, Alexander (Sacha, she called him), the little prince whom she and her husband both adored.

But, alas ! the ship of love, like the ship of friendship, despite gay rigging, often proves itself frail and unseaworthy. Not fair weather but foul is the test of its stability. And even in a calm sea the ship which carried Natalie and Milan had given anxious moments to the pilot. How then could it ride a storm ? How indeed—especially so fierce a storm as that which before long burst over it with overwhelming suddenness ?

IV

Just as the Empress Eugénie sometimes is said to have been the cause of the great war of 1870, which wrecked the power of Napoleon III in the heyday of its splendour, so Natalie sometimes is said to have provoked the war of 1885, between Servia and Bulgaria.

Be this as it may, that war also ended in disaster. The

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noble edifice which Milan had laboriously constructed crumbled, like a pack of cards, in an instant to the ground. His life work, his good resolves, his noble intentions seemed to have resulted only in failure. And now when he needed it most—this was the bitterest blow of all—Natalie withheld from him her sympathy. Indeed, the old quarrels between the King and Queen again broke forth, and with renewed vigour. And Milan, under the influence of defeat and disappointment, made no endeavour to conceal them. They became the talk of Servia; and, upon the King, reacted in the inevitable manner. Weary of fruitless effort, weary of domestic misery, he plunged wildly into his former reckless mode of living. Domestic troubles had rendered life at the palace unendurable.

“The Castle,” wrote a Servian officer, in a letter to his family, “is in a state of utter confusion; one scandalous scene succeeds another; the King looks ill, as if he never slept. Poor fellow! he flies for refuge to us in the guard-house and plays cards with the officers. Sometimes he speaks bitterly about his unhappiness at home. . . . Card playing, however, is his worst enemy; it will work his total ruin.”

Thus, while he drifted aimlessly along, Natalie, or rather conspiracy and disorder, ruled the land. No king could have found himself in a more invidious position. But Milan, who once had been ambitious, still had pride. And it was pride which at length roused him from his lethargy, and forced him to make

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another effort to retrieve his fallen fortunes—just one more. Once again, however, bad luck attended him.

Nikola Christitch, whom he chose as his adviser, was, it is true, a man of great ability. But, unfortunately, he was merely his wife's cat's paw. And Artemesia Christitch was perhaps the cleverest woman in the Balkans, totally unscrupulous, and, it so happened, the Queen's most bitter enemy. To ruin Natalie was the ambition of her life, and to achieve her object she was prepared to sacrifice even the King.

Now in the hands of such a woman Milan, of course, was powerless. He allowed himself to become entangled helplessly in the meshes of her fascination. Then he saw what he had done, and tried to escape. But it was too late. Already he had lost the respect of his subjects ; already Natalie was cognizant of the plot against her.

But she, instead of trying to save her husband from himself, instead of allowing him to come to her and plead forgiveness, proceeded to counterplot with ruthless cunning. The fever of ambition had seized her firmly. And she aspired now to drive Milan from his throne, and establish herself as regent until her son should come of age.

A crisis obviously was imminent, and in 1887 it reached a climax. At the Easter reception, held at the palace, it was customary for the Queen to kiss the wives of State officials and foreign representatives. On this occasion, however, as the wife of a certain Greek diplomat advanced to receive the honour, Natalie

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turned her head aside contemptuously ; she refused even to look at the woman. In vain the chamberlain remonstrated with her, imploring her to consider the consequences of her action. In vain Milan himself interceded. Natalie was obdurate. Why, she asked, should she be gracious to the latest recipient of her husband's favours ?

And the insult in her words, audible to all who chose to listen, was more even than the tactfulness of courtiers could counteract. Despite its diplomatic significance, to hush up the scandal was found to be impossible, Natalie's remarks being nothing other than a declaration of open war between herself and the King her husband. Clearly, then, Servia henceforth would not be big enough to hold both her and Milan. One of them must go.

But which ?

The King, infuriated by his wife's indiscreet behaviour, wished for an immediate divorce. The Emperor Francis Joseph, however, dissuaded him from taking so extreme a course. Such action, he pointed out, would be a crowning act of folly, and spell ruin both to Milan and the House of Obrenovitch, for Natalie, in spite of all her faults, was still the idol of the people, and, in the rôle of the injured wife, would receive a full measure of their sympathy.

Accordingly, until a reconciliation or some permanent arrangement could be agreed upon, it was decided that she should leave the kingdom and live abroad with her

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son in whatever town the King might choose for the latter's education, but that, during the Crown Prince's annual visits to his father, she should be free to travel where she liked.

On April 6, 1887, husband and wife parted. It was a sorry day, this. Both felt the situation keenly. As they stood at the railway station, bidding a formal farewell to one another, instinctively their thoughts travelled back, over years gone beyond recall, to their wedding-morning. They remembered the cheers, their joy, their happiness, and how, with a perfect trust in one another, they had set out together down the unknown road of life. And this was to be the end! That journey indeed had proved a miserable failure! And it might have been so different—both saw it now—so very different, if only ambition had not warred with love.

The thought of separation had delighted Milan, but the reality, now that it had come to him, pained him even more than had domestic discord. He could not disguise his emotion. But had his dream of happiness faded irrevocably? Was it too late for himself and Natalie mutually to forgive and to forget? He still had hope. And there is an infinite tenderness in the letters which he sent to her during the early months of their separation.

"I would be much obliged," he wrote from Gleichenberg in September, "if you would let me know what are your wishes as to our future relations towards one

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another. As on my homeward journey I must pass Baden, it would be, I think, proper for me to stop there in order to pay you a short visit before I continue my journey to Vienna. If this proposal should not please you, then perhaps you will spare Sacha to me. I would only take him as far as Vienna, and bring him back the next afternoon."

And later, when writing to implore her to keep her compact and not to return to Belgrade merely in order to further her ambitions, the reason which he gave was this: "Our son is now old enough to notice the estrangement between us."

But Natalie—what were her feelings? It is difficult to say, for pride and ambition dominated her. Still, in her letters, too, there is a note of real regret. "You might," she remarked in one of them, "have chosen a more experienced consort, but not one ~~more~~ devoted." Or again, "If you have made me unhappy," she said, "you are still more unhappy than I am, and the day will come when you will view things differently, and you will find no excuse for your conduct." A woman's love dies very hard.

If only, then, during this period of separation, Natalie had been tactful and unselfish, even now all might have been well. But plotting had become a mania with her; it was the very essence of her life. Instead, therefore, of quietly seeking a reconciliation, she struggled boldly to regain what she regarded as her rights, and thereby forced her husband's hand until

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ultimately he had no alternative other than to take the Crown Prince from her keeping.

To be robbed of her son—Natalie had suffered much ; this she could not endure, and would not. Arguments were of no avail ; threats were of no avail ; nor were entreaties. The Queen was obdurate ; never, she maintained, would she surrender her son—and for this who can blame her?—to the care of Artemesia Christitch, who now openly was Milan's paramour. At length, therefore, the King was left with no alternative other than to send to Wiesbaden to remove the boy by force.

Not yet did Natalie yield. Indeed, when Milan's agent, General Protitsch, burst into the room where she, with the Prince by her side, awaited him, he found a pistol levelled at his head, and the hand which held it did not swerve the fraction of an inch.

"Advance," said the Queen, with deliberate firmness, "and I fire."

"Madam, you cannot be in earnest," replied the soldier courteously. "I have my orders. Your Majesty knows an officer must obey his orders."

Then Natalie yielded. But, in that one minute, all her love for Milan turned to hatred. Without giving another thought to reconciliation, she resolved that henceforth there should be war between her husband and herself, war to the death. And, although he had scored the first success, she saw clearly now that she would score the last. His victory had left him only

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with a fatal course of action to pursue ; now he must of necessity sever completely his marriage tie. Pride gave him no alternative. And for divorce proceedings, no time could have been less propitious for him than the present.

Indeed, to Natalie, first robbed of her son, and then renounced by the man who had robbed her, the sympathies of the Servian people went out wholeheartedly. The King, they regarded as an object of suspicion and scorn, so that his position as their ruler became impossible ; he felt no longer justified in retaining it. Nor now had he desire to. Fruitless strivings had quelled his ambitions and his hopes. He had grown weary, struggling with the heavy burden of kingship, whilst from afar the voice of pleasure cooed to him promises of peace and happiness. Besides, were he to stay in Servia longer, he would undoubtedly lose all. By abdicating, however, he might still perhaps be able to save something for his son.

In March, 1889, therefore, he laid down his crown and retired to Paris, leaving regents to govern the country until Prince Alexander should come of age.

And with that act ends the sorry story of his reign. Henceforth he plays but a small part on the stage of life. In Paris he soon ceased even to be notorious, passing unnoticed among the reckless throng of aimless pleasure-seekers, so that before long even restaurant proprietors forgot to remind their guests that "the gentleman with a dark moustache sitting over there"

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was the ex-King of Servia. To politics he paid but little heed, and he interfered only when the regents or the Government asked him for advice. Then he gave it reluctantly.

But in Natalie thirst for power remained still unabated. Nothing could quench it; not even the awful experience of being driven from the country by force of arms. And in the end she triumphed, for later, as her son's chosen adviser, she became, in fact if not in name, ruler of Servia.

After the divorce, however, her path and Milan's only once converged. In August, 1895, King Alexander decided to bring to an end the regency, and to seize with his own hands the reins of government. It was a daring move, this great *coup d'état*, and brilliantly executed. But it deserves mention here only because Milan was chosen as the emissary to convey to Natalie the news of her son's intentions.

And Milan went. Thus, after many long years of separation, wife and husband met. And a terrible and trying ordeal that meeting proved to be. Emotion overcame them both. The room seemed to be filled with the ghosts of the past, and the voice of memory was very cruel now a new and unexpected bond of unity had sprung up between them—the triumph of their son. In him, at any rate, each could see the other; and with proud, loving, anxious eyes they watched his every action, for he was all that was left to them of their love, and of their dream of happiness.

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Alexander, too, was a prince of promise, a man of courage, with the gift of statecraft. But just as marriage had wrecked the greatness of the father, so now it wrecked the greatness of the son. Which particular fiend of folly persuaded the King to marry that particular one of his mother's ladies-in-waiting he chose to marry, it is impossible to say.

Clever Draga Maschin may have been, but she was not the woman for the boy King of Servia to take to wife. In the first place, she was old enough to be her husband's mother, and, secondly, she was the most unpopular woman in all Servia; the people hated her, and for imposing her upon them as their Queen they never forgave King Alexander.

Nor did his father ever forgive him for marrying her. But Milan did not live to see the awful consequences of his son's infatuation. His heart had long been weak—some say that it was broken—and he died at Vienna on February 11, 1901. More than two years, therefore, elapsed before that memorable morning dawned when Europe awoke to hear the ghastly tidings that the King of Servia and his Queen had been foully murdered in the night.

Thus faded the last of Natalie's dreams. Nor was there any one to console her in her sorrow.

**Nadír Shah and Sitara, the
Hindu Slave-Girl**




NADIR SHAH

IV

NADIR SHAH AND SITARA, THE HINDU SLAVE-GIRL

I

HE great Mogul Empire lay helpless at his feet. Victory had been overwhelming in its completeness. Nadir Shah lay back among the cushions in his tent and laughed a laugh of grim satisfaction. Soon he would find himself in the position of Alexander the Great, sighing for fresh worlds to conquer. Ah, but it was a pleasant thought ; the consciousness of triumph—there is no sensation more exhilarating. For a moment, the warrior's stern, black-bearded face relaxed into an almost tender smile.

And surely, he had every reason to be satisfied. A Turkoman by birth ; a soldier of fortune by inclination ; by profession a freebooter, he had risen by the aid of his magnetic personality and military daring, until at last, in 1736, at the age of forty-nine, he became Shah of Persia.

Not even was the career of Napoleon more meteoric.

When Nadir ascended the throne he found Persia in a state of disruption. Enemies beset the kingdom on every hand, Turks, Russians, Afghans. Sedition

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and anarchy reigned everywhere supreme. But, out of disorder, the new ruler, by superhuman efforts, soon created order, and, as the head of a united people, established himself the terror of a continent. And now he had invaded India, and crushed the Mogul Emperor.

That very day, in fact, his proud adversary had come in person to his camp to sue for peace ; had come in person and been sent away humiliated, humbled to the dust ; he, the mighty ruler who once had dared to hurl insults at the upstart Shah of Persia.

Yes—success, indeed, was very sweet ; but revenge far sweeter. So Nadir drained another goblet of wine, nestled further back among his cushions, and proceeded to discuss plans for the future with Ali Akbar and Ahmed Khan, his two great Ministers.

No, he declared, nothing was further from his mind than the intention to appropriate the Emperor's dominions ; to attempt that would be merely courting trouble. All he desired was to humiliate his rival, to humiliate him utterly. So soon, then, as the army had recovered of its fatigue, he would march on Delhi. For a while, as victor, he would occupy the city ; then formally restore to the Emperor his regal dignity, and himself return northwards.

Aye—but he had another purpose also. Delhi was rich. War was expensive ; and his own subjects already were groaning under the burden of taxation—he dared not oppress them further. Why, then, should not the vanquished pay the price of his ambition ? Why not

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indeed ? Besides, with the riches of Delhi in his coffers, he could see no limit to his future conquests.

And Nadir again laughed, grimly.

Suddenly he stopped. From without the tent came the sound of voices and tramping feet. The Shah sat up and listened ; he had been waiting for that sound. A moment later the curtain was pulled aside, and a servant entered, stepping noiselessly across carpets on the floor.

“What is it ?” Nadir asked.

The man made deep obeisance. The Mogul Emperor, he said, had just sent his promised tribute—an elephant, some horses, fifty slave-boys, and as many of India’s fairest women.

Nadir rose to his feet immediately. The gift was already overdue ; he had been eagerly awaiting its arrival. It was too dark now—besides, he was too tired—to inspect the horses. He would leave them until the morning.

But the women—he was anxious to see them, very anxious ; he had heard much of Indian maidens. Had not Ahmed Khan told him of them : that they were as slender as cypress trees, as graceful as deer, and that their eyes shone as the very stars of night ? And Ahmed Khan was a native of Kandahar, which is near to Hindustan. . He then most surely ought to know.

So Nadir did not delay one minute. Forthwith he left his tent, and moved towards that in which the

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captive women were assembled. No sooner had he entered than he saw that they did not belie their reputation. Among them were many graceful forms and many lovely faces. But Nadir had eyes only for one of them ; she stood in the middle of the line ; a tall, slim girl whose complexion was almost European in its fairness.

But now a bright flush glowed in her cheeks, and she turned on the conqueror a look of proud defiance which compelled his gaze.

“ Who is that girl ? ” he asked.

“ My lord, a maiden of the Rajputs,” replied an obsequious eunuch.

“ Maiden indeed ! ” And the girl laughed contemptuously. “ Maiden indeed ! ” she repeated, “ I have been a *wife* ! ”

The eunuch, dismayed by the girl’s audacity, moved forward as if to strike with his slipper the lips which had dared to utter this impertinence. Suddenly he drew back. Sitara—for such was her name—had drawn a dagger from her bosom, and held it menacingly. There was no mistaking the meaning of her attitude.

And Nadir laughed. The girl’s action had pleased his present humour. Then he addressed her personally.

“ Give me that knife,” he said.

Sitara stood motionless.

“ Give me that knife,” he said again ; this time more sternly.

The girl hesitated, but only for a moment. There

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was command in Nadir's voice. So she obeyed. And Nadir took the weapon, thrust it in his girdle; then, without another word, passed slowly down the line of captive women.

II

Back in his own tent again, the Shah sat for a long while wrapped in thought. He could not banish from his mind the incident with Sitara. And as he sat silent, toying with the dagger he had taken from her, a faint smile played upon his lips. The woman interested him.

He, who had known and loved many women, had never before met one like this. She possessed the courage of ten men, and her beauty—ah! he had never seen the like of it. A sudden fire leapt into the man's eyes, intense and passionate. He must see her again, he told himself; see her immediately—and alone. He rose to his feet, and called for a servant.

"Send the Agha Bashi to me," he commanded. And the servant, noticing the look on his royal master's face, hastened to do his bidding.

A moment later, the Agha Bashi, or chief official of the harem, entered the tent; he was a tall, sad-faced negro.

Peremptorily Nadir told him of his wishes. The man looked troubled. He was a loyal servant, devoted to his master, and he remembered only too well Sitara's reckless courage. Was it right that the Shah should be left with her alone? He thought not; and

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ventured to make a protest. But Nadir checked him.

"Send the girl to me," he said ; "I want her—now."

Then the faithful eunuch bowed his head. "As the Shah wills," he muttered, and passed out.

Nadir watched him go ; then he rose to his feet again, and for a few restless minutes paced his tent. The stillness of the night oppressed him. So he resumed his seat, and waited.

Presently the curtain was flung aside. The man's eyes rested on it, fascinated. And a moment later the slave-girl entered. She walked with timid, anxious steps, and her head was bowed ; but there was dignity in her carriage, although her bosom heaved and her lips moved tremulously. Nadir gazed at her spellbound. She was more beautiful than she had seemed before, a thousandfold more beautiful. His eyes feasted upon her. And in the dim lamplight her flimsy draperies seemed only to accentuate her loveliness. In the middle of the tent she stopped, standing motionless. Then Nadir spoke to her.

"Come nearer, girl," he said. "Look at me ! What is it ? You are frightened ?"

And Sitara shot him one quick, fearful glance. She *was* frightened ; and well might she have been, for she was moving, so she thought, to punishment, to death.

And she did not want to die ; an hour ago she would not have cared. But now !— She wanted now to live, now that she had found a reason for it. Hitherto her

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lot had been thrown among effeminate puppets and sycophants, but now she stood before a man, a man such as she had often dreamed of, strong and masterful; and she longed, then and there, to throw herself before his feet and swear to serve him always. For his love she dared not to ask. What right had she? To serve him—that alone would be enough; to die for him if need be.

Some instinct within him told Nadir that this was so, and he loved the girl the more for it. Women usually looked to him only for favours. But this one refused to plead with him even for her life.

And that, as Nadir was man enough to know, required real courage. So, with all the gentleness at his command, he sought to put her at her ease, assuring her of his forgiveness, talking to her. Then he made her tell him her life's history.

She, too, it seemed, had no affection for the Moguls. She had been born a Hindu, but, when still a child, had been captured and married to a Mogul warrior. From him she had escaped, and, after many adventures, had found refuge with a band of Marwári traders. They, in due course, had brought her to Delhi. There, one of the Emperor's wives, a woman of her own country, had taken pity on her, and in her service she had remained until that very day.

For a while, after the conclusion of this narrative, Nadir was silent. Then he spoke, and his voice quavered with emotion. Henceforth she could be a queen

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herself, he said, a queen before whom all the world should bow. Would she ? Would she ? Sitara's senses reeled. She who had come to him as a suppliant found the conqueror himself pleading before her, offering her honour, riches, power, when even the littlest word of tenderness would have meant bliss sublime. Would she indeed ? Impulsively she threw herself before his feet, showering them with kisses, hot, passionate kisses, of gratitude and love. ,

But Nadir raised her up. She was to be his Queen, he said, not his servant ; all other women should be as the dust on which she walked ; she must not humiliate herself.

Then he sent for the Agha Bashi, and the Agha Bashi sent for the priest. And a few minutes later Sitara left the tent the honoured wife of the greatest soldier of the day, sparkling with jewels, diamonds and emeralds and pearls.

The news spread quickly through the camp, and idle tongues wagged maliciously. But Sitara heeded not these things ; she was too happy, ah ! much too happy. At this time the all-consuming love she bore for Nadir filled her life utterly ; she could think of nothing else. Nor did she wish to. Lonely, it is true, she felt sometimes. That was inevitable. A stranger among a strange people, how could she be aught but lonely ?

But she rejoiced in her solitude ; she loved those long, hot days when she could lie in her tent alone, and think, and dream, and wait for the approach of evening.

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For at nightfall she knew that Nadir would come to her, and come not as a king, but as a man; and from then, till dawn once more called him forth to duty, he would be hers, hers absolutely, and she his.

And at nightfall he always came.

Then again, she soon made friends among the other women in the camp. How could she help it? Very simple, very lovable, it was not easy even for jealous rivals to begrudge her courtesy. Yet this, her very simplicity and charm, earned for her also at least one relentless enemy, Shirazái, a former favourite, whom she had deposed from the place of honour in the Shah's esteem.

Now Shirazái hated Sitara with all the fierce hatred of an Oriental, and swore to herself that she would never rest till she had worked some hideous vengeance on her rival. But of these intentions Sitara guessed nothing. Nor did Shirazái mean her to; she was much too cunning. Instead, she posed as the girl's friend, masking her true feelings behind soft speeches and kindly gestures, and so sought to gain her confidence.

The time would come, she thought, when that confidence might be of service to her. Till then she could afford to wait—and watch.

Now, Shirazái was a factor to be reckoned with, for she happened to be none other than a sister of Ali Akbar.

But Sitara little knew what grim troubles the future was storing up for her. And, had she known, would

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she have cared ? “Unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday”—was not the present sweet enough for her ? Yes, yes ; a thousand times, yes. She had found a love such as woman never before had known or even dreamed of. What else mattered ? One moment of that love would amply compensate for years of torment.

Even Nadir’s courtiers marvelled at their monarch’s constancy, sagely nodding their heads, wondering what the end would be.

III

And so the victorious army rested, day following day in quick succession. But for Nadir the time passed all too quickly. His troops, he knew, already had remained inactive overlong ; further delay might cause them to grow lazy and ill-disciplined. So he aroused himself.

On the morrow, he declared, he would set out for Delhi ; preparations for the journey, therefore, must begin immediately. Forthwith they began. It was a busy day for everybody. And at nightfall, when he went as usual to Sitara’s tent, Nadir was tired and fretful ; he felt like a man just awakened from some happy dream, as, indeed, the call of duty had awakened him. A great wave of self-pity passed over him, flooding his heart with sadness. That sweet companionship with the woman whom he loved, he now saw could never be again what it had been ; in future there would

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be other claims upon him—the claims of government and war.

Why then, he asked himself, had he not delayed just one more week? A woman's love—how much more precious he thought it then than all the sterling gifts of power. Idle dalliance, perchance, had softened the man's heart.

Nor did his sadness escape Sitara's notice. She wondered at it greatly; nor, try as she would, could she dispel it.

But then, she knew not what it was that made him sad; not until suddenly he took from his turban a superb and priceless diamond, which he had worn always there as a mascot, and begged her to accept it as a gift.

"And," he said, "if you want to come to me at any time, but send this stone, and you shall always be received."

Then Sitara took the stone—but sorrowfully; until then it had not occurred to her that she might ever have need for such a charm.

Yet, even so, it seemed merely to be a passing cloud which for a moment had overhung her happiness—this sudden thought of fear. On the next day began the march to Delhi. And to Sitara that journey was a week of new and wonderful experiences; she enjoyed every moment of it, as she rode in triumph by her lover's side, and then, at the end, with him entered the city.

That was at once the proudest and the saddest moment in her life. She had left Delhi a captive;

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she returned a Queen, and found herself lodged in the "Palace of Joy" amid every luxury, as befitted the conqueror's most favoured consort.

Then, on the following day, the Mogul Queen—she, whose handmaiden Sitara once had been—besought an interview, and, on her bended knees, implored the girl to use her influence with the Shah to spare the city. And Sitara promised.

The world had dealt very kindly with her ; she felt she could afford now to be indulgent. So, when Nadir came to her that night, she told him of her promise ; and laughingly he conceded it. But she need not have asked, he said ; already he had issued orders to the troops, forbidding violence and plunder. Nor, he added, were they likely to ignore those orders. Whilst from the citizens of Delhi he feared nothing ; defeat had cowed them utterly.

But not as utterly as Nadir thought. So it came about that, a few days later, Sitara suddenly was aroused by the sounds of shouts and tumult. What had happened ? Had Nadir forgotten his promise to her ? No ; surely not that. Then what had happened ? She questioned the Agha Bashi, and was told that the mob had risen in insurrection and were now being punished.

Punished—too well Sitara knew the meaning of that word. So she sent word to Nadir, begging him to stay his hand, and spare the hapless city. Then she waited for a reply. None came. In despair, at last she sent the diamond.

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But still the awful carnage seemed to continue unabated. Never a word did she receive from Nadir. Was he angry with her? Had he ignored her prayer? Or, had she interfered where she had no right to interfere?

Poor girl! she felt sad and disappointed. Once, only once, had she asked a favour, and it had been refused. No wonder she was filled with sorrow.

But then, she did not know the truth. She did not know that all that day her prayer had throbbed in Nadir's pulses, and that the captains had wondered at his moderation. She did not know this till later, when Nadir told her so himself. But it was more even than this sure proof of his great love could do to dispel her sorrow, or make her to forget the hideous fate of the city which once had been her home, and which she had given her solemn word to save from hurt.

She was glad, therefore, when at length the Persian army again moved northwards, its coffers filled with the wealth of Delhi. This, she felt, was the beginning of a new life indeed; and, every moment, the past and all its memories receded further, further in the distance.

The road before her led to a strange land, to new interests, new hopes, and, perhaps, new dangers also; but Sitara had no fears—no, although henceforth her lot would be cast among an alien people who, she knew, detested her. With Nadir at her side, nothing mattered; and by her side he rode, proud, dignified,

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every inch a soldier, whilst in his turban blazed the great Koh-i-nur diamond, the stone which now adorns the Imperial Crown of Britain. Sitara adored the man; and before long was able to prove to him the strength of her devotion.

After many weary miles of marching, the army at length reached the waters of the Indus, and there for a while, on the banks of the river, Nadir decided to let his forces rest. It was his intention to turn the defiles of the Khyber by the country of the Yusufzai, and so proceed northwards. With this aim in view, he had spent a busy day negotiating with the headmen of the tribe; and evening found him tired and irritable, until at last, just before midnight, he sank into a restless sleep.

The night was very hot. From without the tent not a sound came, not even the rustling of a leaf. All was as still as death. And the very weight of the atmosphere was oppressive. Sitara could not sleep. For a long while she lay on her couch, thinking.

Suddenly she sat up. Some one was moving. She was sure of it. Stealthily she rose, crept towards the door of the tent; then looked out. For a moment she could see nothing. But as her eyes became accustomed to the darkness she was able to discern a form gliding along the ground, and then another, and another. Next, the flash of steel caught her eye. Suspicion became certainty. She slipped back into the tent, and gently roused Nadir; but only just in time. In another moment the assassins would have been upon him.

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But, as it happened, hearing the sound of movements, they had fled precipitately. And the murdered bodies of the guards outside alone were left to prove that Sitara's fears had not deceived her. It was she who had given the alarm; she who had saved her lover's life. Nadir did not forget the service.

Perhaps this was well. Not yet had Shirazái forgiven her rival for stealing the Shah's affections. Nor had she been plotting all this time in vain. And now her opportunity for vengeance was at hand.

IV

At Herat, glad news reached Nadir. Reza Khan, the Vali Ahd, or heir apparent—so messengers announced—was hastening with all speed to meet the home-coming army; and expected on the morning of the following day to be able to extend in person a welcome to his father.

Now Nadir had long been looking forward to this meeting; two years had passed since last he had seen his son, and during that time, if rumour spoke aright, the Prince had grown from boyhood into manhood, splendid manhood too. The Shah had heard nothing but good report concerning him; how that he had proved himself a truly able regent, worthy to be the heir to his soldier father.

But, alas! on the morrow, when the son and father met, a cloud marred the splendour and happiness of the

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occasion—that insidious cloud mistrust. Had not the Prince perhaps become too manly, too independent, too self-reliant? A great anxiety seized hold of Nadir. The boy, he feared, instead of being a help to him, might prove a menace; and he looked in vain to find loyalty or affection in his eyes. And of his son's popularity with the people, there could be no doubt. He had won their love and admiration; the Shah himself held only their respect and fear. Hence Nadir was jealous. Nor could he conceal his jealousy.

Now Reza Khan too had reason for resentment. The Shah's return would mean a diminution in his own authority; henceforth no longer could he be an autocrat, but must accept orders from another, and would be expected to obey them unquestioningly. Could he do this? he asked himself. Would he? That is what Nadir asked. And until the future should find an answer to these questions, there could be no bond between the two men either of trust or friendship.

Now Sitara, conscious of Nadir's disappointment, and seeing how trivial really were the causes which estranged him from his son, tried hard to effect a reconciliation.

But this was an ill-judged policy on her part. In the first place, Nadir resented her interference, and her impartiality he resented even more. He had done much for Sitara, and in return, he felt, she owed him at least her whole-hearted sympathy, now that he needed it.

Then again, why should she seek to reconcile him to his son? A sudden fear flashed through his mind. Could

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it be that the Prince and his party had won or bought her to their side? Could it be? Was she being false to him—Sitara? No, no; this he could not, would not believe. Still, somewhere within his heart, the seed of suspicion had taken root, and suspicion, like ivy, grows apace, clinging where it grows.

And then it was that Shirazái, ever watchful, saw that at last her opportunity had come. She had waited patiently for this hour, timing the moment of her vengeance carefully; and her plans were laid with fiendish cunning. First, then, she sought to reinstate herself in Nadir's favour. This did not prove difficult. She had but to offer him the sympathy he asked for in his quarrel with his son; the fascination of her womanhood achieved the rest. Thus, inch by inch, she stole the Shah's affections from Sitara.

And the latter, ignorant of the plot, sorrowed at his changed regard for her. What had she done to offend him? That night, she decided, she would ask her lover and so dispel the cloud which hung between them.

That night! Sitara, alas! already had delayed her question overlong; and now she had lost the opportunity of asking it. That night Nadir did not come to her; in vain she waited for him. The hour of his usual coming came and went, but still she was alone; yet still she waited, still she hoped. Nor did she despair until at length she heard the sound of laughter and of voices in Shirazái's tent. Then suddenly she

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realized the hideous truth; and, throwing herself upon her couch, she sobbed and sobbed and sobbed till Sleep took pity on her.

Such is the common fate of Eastern women. Sitara knew it; hers were tears of disappointment, not of anger.

But for Shirazái, merely to rekindle the fickle flame of Nadir's passion, that alone was not enough; she must bring ruin also to her rival. This she had sworn long ago, and the purpose still was strong within her.

Cunningly, then, she dallied with the Vali Ahd, employing all her many wiles and fascinations to gain his confidence. This once gained, the rest was easy. She had but to adapt his secrets to her own requirements, and then betray them to the Shah. And in this way, by abominable double dealing, she gradually regained her lost prestige, and poisoned Nadir's mind against the girl whose love still and in spite of all was the most precious gift the world had offered him. No act was so mean that she would not commit it; no lie so false that she would not make use of it.

Then came the climax. A few days later, yet another attempt was made on Nadir's life; an unseen hand fired on him while crossing a ravine. So soon as the first shot had been fired, Sitara, it is true, hastened to his side, and stood between him and danger, now, as on the former occasion, shielding him fearlessly from death.

But during the days which followed, Nadir forgot

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this. Lately he had heard much of seditious plots and murderous intentions. He was too angry to feel grateful or remember obligations. The culprit must be found, found at all cost, and held up to the world as an example. This was his determination.

And Shirazái, with all the cunning of her sex, undertook to help in the quest.

By the aid of false witnesses, well paid to serve her purpose, she contrived at last to bring the suspicion of guilt to rest on the shoulders of the Vali Ahd. The shot, she maintained, had been fired at his instigation, by one of his servants ; he was responsible. And such was her evidence that it seemed utterly damning and conclusive.

But this was too terrible. That his own son should seek to murder him ; Nadir could not believe it. Yet, reason as he would, he could find no flaw in the evidence brought forward by Shirazái. Every little detail pointed relentlessly to one conclusion. And motives for the crime were only too apparent ; jealousy, ambition, pride ; aye—there were also many others, and amongst them, the vague suspicion that Reza Khan coveted his father's Queen, that he wanted Sitara, and Sitara him. To Nadir, this came as a crueller blow than even the knowledge of his son's treachery, as a baser act of treason. Yet nothing could shake the sworn testimony of the witnesses.

Fiercely, then, love and anger struggled for supremacy in Nadir's heart. But the result was inevitable.

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An offence had been committed against his royal person which no circumstance could justify. And one punishment only seemed adequate. But death—could he put to death the son he loved most dearly? No—even Nadir's iron determination flinched before passing such a sentence.

None the less, the Prince must be punished, punished heavily, and for the future be rendered powerless at any rate. His son's eyes, then, should be burnt from out his head. That surely was a punishment which would meet the crime; a punishment more horrible perhaps than death. Yet to the father it seemed kinder. Besides, he reflected bitterly, it might serve also as a constant warning to Sitara. A blind lover—could she find charm in him?

And so his royal decree went forth. And a great gladness filled Shirazái's heart. Her plot was working admirably. Forthwith, then, she hastened to the unhappy Prince's mother, with words of tender sympathy. Alas! she could offer nothing more, she said; her influence with the Shah had gone. Then she paused for a minute.

"But Sitara. . . ."

And those words raised sudden hopes in the distracted woman's heart. Sitara—yes, *she* might help. Forthwith the wretched mother sought her out and told the pathetic story of her grief. Nor did her mission prove in vain. Sitara listened sympathetically; and then, despite misgivings, promised to plead with Nadir. She

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knew that she was acting very foolishly ; that her supplication must prove futile. Still she felt she had a duty to perform. Yes—and she would perform it.

Boldly, therefore, she craved an audience. Nadir granted it immediately, bidding her come to him. She went ; and found the Shah sitting in his tent alone, his face hard and set. He had guessed the reason of Sitara's visit ; nor wrongly ; and, as the girl spoke, his expression grew yet still more stern and still more sad.

It had hurt him greatly to pass sentence on his son, but that she should plead against that sentence hurt him more. His worst fears he saw being realized, and Shirazá's dark insinuations taking certain shape within his mind. Sitara's action, he felt, one motive only could have prompted. She loved his son. Her very intercession proved her faithlessness and came to Nadir as the culmination of his sorrows. For a moment he was silent. Then he spoke.

"Go !" he said fiercely, "or I will have you blinded too !"

But still the girl pleaded, clinging to his arm. "My lord," she begged, "have pity ; have pity ; he is your son ! Oh ! spare the Prince, my lord, I pray you."

This was more than Nadir could endure. At last his sorrow found relief in anger ; a fierce wave of wrath passed over him. He rose to his feet and, convulsed with rage, struck at Sitara. The axe fell heavily ; and, beneath its weight, the defenceless girl sank, with a thud, to the ground, and there lay motionless, while

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from her forehead welled a stream of blood, ominous and dark.

For a while the Shah gazed at her prostrate form in horror, stupefied. What had he done? Was she dead? Had he killed her? Fear soothed his savage wrath; and sinking down upon his cushions, great warrior though he was, he wept as though his heart would break.

v

Meanwhile the faithful Agha Bashi took Sitara gently in his arms, and bore her to the doctor. She was not dead. But the negro, for he loved the girl and knew not the true circumstances of the quarrel, deemed it wise to keep this secret from the Shah. He acted on his own responsibility. For several days Sitara lay unconscious, hovering between life and death. Then slowly she regained her reason. But, when at last she could speak and move again, she was already many miles from Nadir.

The Agha Bashi had sent her to the house of an Armenian family who readily had invited her to share their home until it might be safe to tell the Shah that still she lived; and there she settled down to face the future.

But one month passed; then yet another; and still bad tidings only came from Court. To tell the Shah that Sitara was still alive, reports maintained, would certainly spell ruin to all concerned. He had for-

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bidden even her name to be mentioned in his presence, and his fury lately had been uncontrollable.

Now, the courtiers thought that anger caused this fury. So also did Sitara. Shirazái—she only knew the truth ; that it was grief which made him mad, grief and disappointment. Nadir had loved Sitara, nay, he loved her still, and with a love such as Eastern men rarely feel for women. Besides, since that day on which foully he had murdered Love, nothing would go well with him. His mind, he felt, had lost its old precision, his brain its cunning. There seemed to be no one he could trust, and every day his enemies increased in strength and numbers. Superstitious fancies harassed him.

The truth is, Nemesis at last had overtaken the great warrior. And, although he grappled desperately with Fate—the fate which he had prepared for himself through long, fierce years of conquest—he fought in vain. The reins of empire, now too big for one man's hands, were slipping from his grasp. He knew it, but was powerless to restrain them. And his courtiers moved round him warily in very terror of their lives.

Thus months passed into years, and still Sitara received no word from him. Then despair entered her soul, strangling hope, and she walked like one for whom life held no more joys. But her great love for Nadir still burned as true as ever. She bore no malice towards the man who had struck her down. No, womanlike—his sudden cruelty had only intensified

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her love ; and she longed, longed with a longing which nothing could efface, for that day on which she and he again might be united.

Yet would that day ever come ? The Shah's love for her, she asked—how could it still live ? There were women in the world fairer than she, whose love he could enjoy. Besides, did he not think her dead ; that he himself had murdered her ?

Now, at length, it came about that Nadir, while campaigning, happened to pass near to the little Armenian village which for three long years had given shelter to Sitara. And to the girl the temptation now to go to the man she loved proved irresistible.

In vain, friends urged her to be cautious ; in vain, they pleaded. Sitara was obdurate. Go to him she would, whatever might be the cost. Determination was strong within her ; and death—she feared not death ; to die by Nadir's hand would be happiness indeed, compared to still more years of purposeless existence.

Besides, in her inmost heart she felt that Nadir needed her, was calling to her, even as she needed him. And so she sought out a trusty emissary and sent him with a letter to the Persian camp, and, with it, that stone which Nadir had given her now many years ago. Then she waited.

And her woman's intuition had guided her aright. Nadir had not forgotten. Nadir did need her. Indeed, nothing could describe the joy he felt on learning that Sitara, his loved Sitara, had come to life

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again. Forthwith he sent to her a royal escort, and begged her hasten to him with all speed. But this request was quite superfluous. Sitara did not delay one minute; and two days later entered the Persian camp in all her splendour as a Queen.

There Nadir met her. And in that rapturous moment of reunion the past and all its sufferings faded like the memory of some awful dream at dawn. Henceforth there was no more separation. The broken link soon mended, and made the chain of love, which bound her and the Shah together, stronger than it had ever been.

But the days of Nadir's greatness now were numbered—and with them his days of happiness. Destiny had proved too strong for him; he was struggling now for very life; and among his own followers were to be found his bitterest enemies. The end was inevitable; and very soon it came.

Suddenly, in the still darkness of a night, while she was sitting watching by the bedside of her wearied lord, Sitara heard suspicious movements outside the tent.

Immediately she rose to her feet. But this time the sounds had reached her ears too late. Before she could move, before even she could scream, the assassins were with her in the tent and had pinioned down the sleeping warrior.

And later, when the tardy guards arrived, they found their ruler lying dead upon the floor, and, stretched on his giant form, the young body of the woman he had loved, an evil-pointed dagger buried deep within her heart.

Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck



MADAME SCHUMANN


Photo by Elliott and Fry, London

Sh. 100

V

ROBERT SCHUMANN AND CLARA WIECK

I

S domestic misery the inevitable penalty of genius? One is tempted almost to believe it must be, so much does one hear about the disastrous love entanglements of famous men. But the belief, of course, is quite untenable. Great men, it is true, sometimes have shown themselves unwise and unsuccessful lovers. So, too, have little men; many of them, too many. Among them, in fact, the percentage certainly is as high as, if not higher than, among the great; but with this difference—their shortcomings attract but little notice, being of interest only to their friends and relatives; whilst those of the great are blazoned forth immediately to all the world.

This is one of those happenings which must be. The glass houses of the gods of our mundane Olympus are tempting targets for the stones of the dwellers on the lonely plains of life.

It would be absurd, then, to dogmatize; absurd to maintain that happiness always is denied to genius. There can be no such rule. The exceptions, at any rate, are much too numerous to prove it. But, among

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them, among that legion of great men whose private lives also have been great, surely there are no more splendid figures than those of Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck.

It was a wondrous love that those two bore for one another, a love more precious and rarer far even than all the genius of the two great souls whom it affected. And the story of it well deserves retelling; it is as fine as any mentioned in the records of Romance.

Robert Schumann was a musician. So also was Clara Wieck. They were two beings whose minds and inclinations both were in perfect harmony; and from the very day on which they accepted each the other's love they remained true and loyal to one another until death; in their constancy neither of them wavered once.

And this was so, despite the fact that Schumann was the most susceptible of mortals, an artist who craved for the beautiful things of the world, who lived for love, and whose life, until Clara Wieck entered into it, was literally a series of amorous attachments, which followed one another in romantic and bewildering succession.

It was in 1827 that first he fell the victim to a woman's charm. At the time he was only seventeen years of age, and all that is known of the lady is the impression which she made upon her fanciful young lover. "Oh friend," he wrote to a school-fellow, "were I but a smile, how I would flit about her eyes! . . .

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were I but joy, how gently would I throb in all her pulses ! yea, might I be but a tear, I would weep with her, and then, if she smiled again, how gladly would I die upon her eyelids, and gladly be no more."

But the attractions of the unknown soon waned before the charm of another, a girl whom he named "Liddy." Beautiful undoubtedly she must have been, but beauty, it would seem, was her sole accomplishment ; she was sadly lacking in intellectual gifts, incapable—so Schumann said himself—of "grasping a single idea."

Hers, then, was but a sweet and fleeting power of fascination. In due course it yielded to that of "Nanni" ; and then, with the mature wisdom of his years, her erstwhile lover wrote : "I think I loved her, but I knew only the outward form in which the roseate-tinted fancy of youth often embodies its inmost longings."

His love for "Nanni," however—it, too, proved transient, lasting but a year ; then it subsided, remaining with him only as "a quietly burning sacred flame of pure, divine friendship and reverence." Still, he delighted in thinking of "Nanni," and in remembering all the hours he "dreamed so joyfully, so blissfully in her arms and her love."

And he continued thus to dream till 1828. Then he went to Augsburg, and at Augsburg he met Clara von Kùrer.

Clara was the daughter of a chemist, languorous-eyed and charming. Schumann fell in love with her

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immediately ; and she encouraged him. But when the time came for him to speak of his great passion, he found that she already was betrothed ; in short, that the girl merely had been flirting with him. This was a cruel blow to his dignity ; and as quite a broken-hearted student, he proceeded then from Augsburg to the University of Leipsic to study law.

It was his mother's wish that Schumann should become a lawyer. He himself hated the idea, but there was no appeal against his mother's mandates, for his father—and his father was the only person who, as yet, had recognized the boy's true talent—already had been dead for several years. Robert, therefore, had to go to Leipsic.

Still, once there, he allowed his legal studies in no way to inconvenience him. Such time, in fact, as he did not devote to piano playing, he allotted to writing, dreaming, acquiring a taste for extravagant cigars, and, indeed, also to love-making. He was ever careful not to neglect the latter gentle art.

"I found it frightfully hard to leave Leipsic at the last," he wrote to his mother in 1829. "A girl's soul—beautiful, happy, and pure—had enslaved mine." But apparently he escaped easily from the bondage, and in Italy—he journeyed there from Leipsic—soon found some one to console him, a beautiful English girl, "who," he wrote, "seemed to have fallen in love not so much with myself as with my piano playing."

He followed her to Venice. There, alas ! she left him. "My heart is heavy," he declared, ". . . she

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gave me a spray of cypress as we parted. . . . She was very proud and kind, and loving and hating . . . hard, but so soft when I was playing—accursed reminiscences ! ”

Accursed or not, the memory of his love for this English girl, or perhaps, the memory of the English girl's love for his playing, keenly whetted Schumann's desire to adopt music seriously as a profession. He would be a musician. Resolve came to him one night while still at Venice, and forthwith he rose from his bed—it was five o'clock in the morning—and sat down to write to his mother what he declared to be the most important letter he had ever written, a letter in which he pleaded long and eloquently to be allowed at any rate to test his talents.

Now, so eloquently did he beg that the mother, moved at last by his manifest sincerity, decided to refer the question of her son's career to Friedrich Wieck.

To her surprise the great master expressed a firm belief in Robert's talents, and urged her to withdraw her opposition to his wishes. Accordingly she did so, telling her son, soon after his return from Italy, that now, if he still wished it, he might really study music, and study, what is more, under the tuition of none other than Wieck himself.

To Schumann this spelt joy indeed. For such a concession he had never even dared to hope. And his delight was inexpressible, not only because he had won his mother's consent, but because now he had as his master quite the most famous piano teacher of the day.

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II

Nor was Wieck's reputation as a teacher in any way over-estimated. He was undoubtedly the best in Germany. None the less, he happened to be interested in the career of his marvellous daughter even more than in his own profession. Little Clara, in fact, was the centre of all his ambitions; and, although in 1829 when Robert Schumann joined the Wieck household as a pupil and a lodger, she was only nine years old, she had already made her first appearance on the concert platform. Her *début*, incidentally, had startled Europe; and not merely because the pianist was an infant prodigy, but because her playing was such as had never been heard before, even in Germany.

In the company of this youthful genius, then, Robert Schumann's life began. The years that had gone before had been, as it were, wasted years. It was only now that he became conscious of his own stupendous undeveloped power. And to develop that power he worked with feverish industry, under his master's watchful eye.

Still, even now he found time for idle dalliance also. At any rate, letters written to his mother at this time usually contained at least one reference to some adorable and charming girl; and in almost every letter the girl referred to was a different one.

But then, Schumann was naturally a sentimentalist, the human embodiment of his own compositions. Love,

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and the need for love, were essential to his very being, essential to his art. And Fate, it would seem, from the very outset wished him to be the hero of a great romance. Fortunately the world did not withhold from him the opportunity. Even now, in fact, opportunity was knocking at his door.

But of this Schumann was sublimely ignorant. How could he have been otherwise? He was but eighteen years of age, and the girl only nine. For the present he was fascinated merely by Clara's playing. That was all. He was more interested in the person of another girl, Ernestine von Fricken, the adopted daughter of a rich Bohemian baron, who, like himself, was also a pupil-lodger of Friedrich Wieck.

"She has a delightfully pure, childlike mind," he told his mother, "is delicate and thoughtful, deeply attached to me and everything artistic, and uncommonly musical; in short, just such a one as I might wish to have for a wife. I will whisper it in your ear, my good mother, if the Future were to ask me whom I should choose, I should answer unhesitatingly, 'This one.'"

Poor Schumann! Once again his susceptible genius had been ensnared by what it thought was love. The "affair" advanced apace; and, in the early part of the year 1834, the young musician became definitely betrothed to Ernestine, in accordance with all customary German ceremonial. Schumann was in an ecstasy of happiness.

"Ernestine has written to me in great delight,"

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he declared in a letter to his friend Henrietta Voigt, "she has sounded her father by means of her mother, and he gives her to me! Henrietta, he gives her to me! You understand that? And yet I am so wretched; it seems as though I feared to accept this jewel lest it should be in unworthy hands. If you ask me to put a name to my grief I cannot do it. I think it is grief itself; but, alas! it may be love itself, and mere longing for Ernestine. I really cannot stand it any longer, so I have written to her to arrange a meeting one of these days. If you should ever feel thoroughly happy, then think of two souls who have placed all that is most sacred in them in your keeping and whose future happiness is inseparably bound up with your own."

But while Schumann thus was soaring to the dizzy heights of rapture, another member of the Wieck household was tasting for the first time of the bitter cup of disappointment. With sad, anxious eyes, little Clara watched the young composer's infatuation as it grew. Child though she was, she loved Schumann; she had loved him for a long while. He was the one being who could make her life and art complete; she knew it, not knowing how she knew. And it was very hard for her to stand and watch, while another woman, whom she felt to be unworthy of him, robbed her of him, the one man who could give her happiness. It dulled the keen edge of her worldly triumphs.

But of this Schumann knew nothing. He regarded

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Clara merely as a child, and as such he treated her, himself posing as an elder brother. Still, "I often think of you," he wrote in one of his letters, "not as a brother of his sister, not merely in friendship, but rather as a pilgrim thinking of a distant shrine." And Clara, it may be, could read the true meaning of such words, could see that secret of his inner self which had not as yet betrayed itself even to Schumann. He loved her. She knew that in his heart he loved her.

And, indeed, he would have loved her, but for the fact that . . . well ! she was only a child. Why, she was so young that ghost stories still frightened her. It never even occurred to him to regard her as a woman.

Yet, gradually, almost unconsciously, he chose this child as a standard by which to judge other women. By her he judged Ernestine. But for Ernestine the test was too severe. What Schumann had thought to be her virtues he soon saw existed mainly in his own imagination. She was not an interesting girl. Her letters were illiterate and insincere; they jarred upon her lover's senses; whilst, for the thousand and one little deceptions which she practised on him, he could not forgive her.

And then it was that his friendship with Clara began to ripen into a closer tie. He kept "mental trysts" with her, and his letters—they tell their own tale. They are not the letters of a brother.

On one occasion he longed to catch butterflies to be messengers to her. On another he thought of getting

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his letters posted in Paris, so as to arouse her curiosity. And once he told her that if she were present he would press her hands even without her father's leave. "Then," he added, "I might hope that the union of our names on the title-page might foreshadow the union of our ideas in the future."

Clearly, then, it was not only Clara's cleverness which fascinated him. Her person—it too delighted him. Indeed, he declared in reply to one of her childlike effusions, "Your letter was yourself all over. You stood before me laughing and talking; rushing from fun to earnest, as usual; diplomatically playing with your veil. In short, the letter was Clara herself, her double."

And Clara herself was a charming child; she fascinated Schumann; he delighted in watching and studying her. "Clara," he wrote to his mother in 1833, "is as fond of me as ever, and is just as she used to be of old, wild and enthusiastic, skipping and running about like a child, and saying the most intensely thoughtful things. It is a pleasure to see how her gifts of mind and heart keep developing faster and faster, and, as it were, leaf by leaf. The other day, as we were walking back from Cannovitz (we go for a two or three hours' tramp almost every day), I heard her say to herself: 'Oh, how happy I am! how happy!' Who would not love to hear that? On the same road there are a great many useless stones lying about in the middle of the footpath. Now, when I am talking, I

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often look more up than down, so she always walks behind me and gently pulls my coat at every stone to prevent my falling ; meanwhile she stumbles over them herself."

Now to a friendship which had advanced so far as this, surely there could be but one ending. Even Ernestine was wise enough to see this, and made no endeavour to avert the inevitable. In short, she and Schumann agreed mutually to break their troth, admitting that they had ceased to love each other. And neither of them bore malice ; on the contrary they became better friends than ever they had been before.

"I always believed," Ernestine told Schumann later, "that you could love Clara alone, and still believe it." Surely no woman could have acted more graciously.

Now to break an engagement in Germany is a serious undertaking. Indeed, there are, as Schumann found, innumerable formalities to be complied with ; and it was January, 1836, before at last he was free to seek the hand of a girl whom, if ever such things are predestined, the Fates long ago had chosen for his wife.

But the pompous tardiness of legal processes proved more than his impetuosity could tolerate. His love refused to be restrained. At any rate, he could not restrain it ; its insistence mastered good resolves ; and, long before he had been released from his former entanglement, he poured into Clara's eager ears the story of his hopes and dreams.

It was November 25th. Schumann had called on the

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Wiecks to say farewell, for he had arranged to leave on the following day for Leipsic. All the evening he had eyes for nobody in the house, save only for Clara; his ears heard nothing but her voice; his senses were conscious only of her presence. Then, as he rose to go, Clara rose also, and walked with him to the door, carrying in her hand a lamp to light him down the steps.

But to be thus alone with her, to say "good-bye" to her—and who knew when again he would see her?—such a test of endurance Schumann's resolves could not survive. His love surged up within him, and, seizing Clara in his arms, he told her then and there the incoherent story of his passion.

Clara resisted him, and freeing herself from his grasp reminded him of Ernestine.

So far as he was concerned, she no longer existed, Schumann declared. She had broken her word to him, he said, and betrothed herself already to another—a slight inaccuracy which, under the circumstances, perhaps one can forgive him.

Clara, at any rate, believed him; and falling into his arms, she yielded herself gladly and longingly to his embraces. And then, while his lips were pressed to hers, the long-slumbering embers of her love burst suddenly into flame. In that one moment Clara the child became a woman.

"When you gave me that first kiss," she told her lover later, "then I felt myself near swooning. Before

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my eyes it grew black. . . . The lamp I brought to light you I could hardly hold."

Indeed, she did not hold it; she dropped it. That night love almost fired a house.

But for the present, seeing that Schumann's engagement to Ernestine von Fricken not yet had been annulled, the lovers decided to keep their promises made to one another secret. But, in February, Schumann, being free at last to seek Clara's hand, proposed formally to do so. He was quite optimistic as to the result of his petition. "While waiting for the coach at Zwickan—10 p.m. Feb. 13, 1836," he wrote and told her of his hopes.

"Sleep has been weighing on my eyes," he said, "I have been waiting two hours for the express coach. The roads are so bad that we shall not get away till two o'clock. How you stand before me, my beloved Clara: ah, so near you seem to me that I could almost seize you. Once I could put everything daintily in words, telling how strongly I liked any one, but now I cannot any more. And if you do not know I cannot tell you. But love me well. . . . I demand much, since I give much. . . . At Leipsic my first care shall be to put my worldly affairs in order. I am quite clear about my heart. Perhaps your father will not refuse it if I ask him for his blessing. Of course, there is much to be thought of and arranged. But I put great trust in our guardian angel. Fate always intended us for one another. I have known that a long time, but

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my hopes were never strong enough to tell you and get your answer before.

"What I write to-day briefly and incompletely, I will later explain to you, for probably you cannot read me at all. But simply realize that I love you quite unspeakably. The room is getting dark. Passengers near me are going to sleep. It is sleeting and snowing outside. But I will squeeze myself right into a corner, bury my face in the cushions, and think only of you. Farewell, my Clara."

But Schumann's high hopes were doomed to disappointment. On no conditions would Clara's father sanction the engagement. Prayers and entreaties likewise were of no avail. The old man remained obdurate, deaf to reason. "If Clara marries Schumann," he declared on more than one occasion, "I will say it even on my deathbed, she is not worthy of being my daughter."

Nor was he content merely with threats; he made his child promise never again even to see the man she loved. He would shoot Schumann, he said, unless she promised. Then Clara gave him her word. What else could the poor child do? In Germany the conditions of filial independence are different, very different, from those which exist in England. And Clara was a dutiful daughter.

Besides, as she realized, her father's opposition certainly was not altogether without reason. He wished to find for himself a son-in-law who could further

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Clara's interests, a man of great ability or income. But Schumann—of what use could he be to her? The future seemed to hold nothing for him. As a pianist certainly he could never hope now to earn either fame or money, for his right hand, crippled by constant practising, was almost useless to him; and his reputation as a composer, it of course had yet to be established.

For the lovers, then, months of hideous anguish followed the paternal ultimatum, since Clara strove to the utmost to keep the promise she had made to her father; and Schumann, for his part, felt in honour bound not to make the task more difficult. Never a word, then, passed between them; not a note; nor even a message save, of course, such as Schumann could convey in his compositions and Clara in her playing. Messages such as these each sought devotedly.

In the meanwhile, Schumann endeavoured by every means to better his worldly prospects so that one day he might be able to hurl defiance at obstinate parents. At the same time, it is true, he took steps—and who can blame him for this?—surreptitiously to be kept in touch with Clara's doings.

"I am not going to give you anything musical to spell out to-day," he wrote to an acquaintance who was known also to his beloved, "and without beating about the bush will come to the point at once. I have a particular favour to ask of you. It is this: Will you not devote a few moments of your life to acting as

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messenger between two parted souls? At any rate, do not betray them. Give me your word that you will not.

"Clara Wieck loves, and is loved in return. You will soon find that out from her gentle, almost supernatural ways and doings. For the present don't ask me the name of the other one. The happy ones, however, acted, met, talked, and exchanged their vows, without the father's knowledge. He has found them out, wants to take violent measures, and forbids any sort of intercourse on pain of death. Well, it has all happened before, thousands of times. But the worst of it is that she has gone away. The latest news came from Dresden. But we know nothing for certain, though I suspect, indeed I am nearly convinced, that they are at Breslau. Wieck is sure to call upon you at once, and will invite you to come and hear Clara play.

"Now, this is my ardent request, that you should let me know all about Clara as quickly as possible—I mean as to the state of mind, the life she leads, in fact any news you can obtain. All that I have told you is a sacred trust, and don't mention this letter to either the old man or anybody else.

"If Wieck speaks of me, it will probably not be in very flattering terms. Don't let that put you out. . . . I may further remark that it will be an easy thing for you to obtain Clara's confidence, as I (who am more than partial to the lovers) have often told her that I correspond with you. She will be happy to see you

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on that account. . . . Write soon. A heart, a life depends upon it. . . .”

And then, unable longer to contain himself—lover-like, presumably he thought that so far he had concealed the secret—he added, “my own—. For it is I, myself, for whom I have been pleading.”

III

Now Wieck made a sorry mistake in hoping, by oppressive measures, to stifle the attachment between his daughter and Robert Schumann. Adversity is the very soil in which a love such as was theirs thrives best. Wieck might have known this. But he failed to ; nor, would it seem, did he realize that there is a limit even to a daughter's sense of duty. In fact, not content with his past severities, he proceeded now to tax the endurance of the unhappy Clara still more heavily, and sought to replace the idol he had stolen from her heart by one which happened to be pleasing to himself.

And by doing so, by trying thus to thrust upon the daughter, whose wishes he had thwarted, a husband chosen by himself, he displayed amazing ignorance of those laws which govern women's hearts.

Carl Banck, the man whom he ordained that Clara should marry, was, of course, eminently eligible, for he was a singer to whom a great future seemed to be assured.

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But marry him—marry him simply because her father wished it—Clara could not, would not. Besides, she disliked the man. And dislike turned to hatred when Banck sought to capture her affections by maligning Schumann. Such dastardly methods as those even Clara's gentle spirit could not tolerate; and her feelings, long pent up, now burst forth in glorious revolt.

Why, she asked herself, should she remain loyal to a promise made solely to satisfy her father's vanity? It was ridiculous. She would not. She told Schumann so. And henceforth letters flew between herself and him as often as trusty emissaries could be found to carry them.

At last even a meeting was arranged. It was a dangerous undertaking, and the lovers both were greatly agitated. Schumann was almost dumb with fear and joy; Clara nearly fainted. Still, it was a sweet thing to look back upon, this secret tryst.

"The moon shone so beautifully on your face," Clara told her lover later, "when you lifted your hat and passed your hand across your forehead; I had the sweetest feeling that I ever had; I had found my love again."

Fortified by this renewal of his happiness, in September, 1837, Schumann dared again appeal to Wieck. He chose the occasion carefully, sending his letter to the obdurate old gentleman on Clara's birthday, "the day," he said, "on which the dearest being in the world, for you as for me, first saw the light of the world."

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But even this failed to melt the father's heart. "Nothing shall shake me," he replied. And nothing, it seemed, would shake him. Schumann essayed every means within his power; he interviewed him; he sent messages to him; he wrote to him, but all in vain. Despair entered his heart.

"Ask her eyes," he implored, "whether I have told you the truth. Eighteen months long have you tested me. If you have found me worthy, true, and manly, then seal this union; it lacks nothing of the higher bliss, except the paternal blessing. An awful moment it is until I learn your decision, awful as the pause between lightning and thunder in the tempest, where man does not know whether it will give destruction or benediction. Be again a friend to one of your oldest friends, and to the best of children be the best of fathers."

Now the extravagance of this appeal really disconcerted Wieck. Despite himself, he was beginning to entertain a grudging admiration for the perseverance of his would-be son-in-law, and in consequence knew not what to say in reply. Accordingly, he took refuge in evasion. "Wieck's answer was so confused," Schumann wrote to a friend, "and he declined and accepted so vaguely, that now I really don't know what to do. Not at all. He was not able to make any valid objections; but as I said before, one could make nothing of his letter. I have not spoken to C. yet; her strength is my only hope."

None the less, Wieck did now make a small concession.

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Perhaps he saw that he could have no peace until he had. At any rate, he told the lovers that in future they might meet from time to time—in the presence of a chaperon; and even that they might correspond occasionally when Clara was travelling.

Schumann for his part, however, placed but little confidence in such promises. "There is nothing in this, believe me," he wrote to Clara; "he will throw you to the first comer who has gold and title enough."

Still, he could not but admit that these concessions were not to be despised. To be able to see Clara occasionally; and to write to her—that alone was enough to spur him on to great endeavours. So he set to work as he had never worked before. And dreams made even work delight, for his thoughts now were centred always in the future. "We shall lead," he told Clara, "a life of poetry and blossoms, and we shall play and compose together like angels, and bring gladness to mankind."

The Schumann romance by this time had become historical. It was the talk of Europe. The lovers were inundated with letters of advice and sympathy. Admirers even offered them money in order that they might marry immediately, and live in comfort. The secret messengers were numberless. Among them was a Russian prince. Chopin, too, Mendelssohn and Liszt, all were implicated. But to Clara and Schumann this notoriety proved hateful. Firmly they waived aside all offers of assistance, deeming it best to be

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patient, at any rate, until Easter, 1840. Then, they resolved, they would marry whatever might happen.

But it was a terrible prospect, this waiting. "My sole wish," Clara wrote, "is—I wish it every morning—that I could sleep for two years; could oversleep all the thousand tears that shall yet flow . . . Foolish wish! I am such a silly child. Do you remember that two years ago on Christmas Eve you gave me white pearls and mother said then: 'Pearls mean tears'? She was right; they followed only too soon."

What is more, still they were with her. Not even yet would the father allow his daughter any peace. He was always tormenting her, and presenting to her odious suitors; whilst he seemed to delight in doing everything he could to poison her mind against the man she loved.

He accused Schumann of infidelity to her, defamed his character, even declared that he was an inveterate drunkard. But to these charges Schumann answered readily—to Clara. "I should not be worth being spoken to," he said, "if a man trusted by so good and noble a girl as you, should not be a respectable man and not control himself in everything. Let this simple word put you at your ease for ever."

Still, these scandalous imputations against his character goaded him to frenzy; he resented them bitterly, and, if only as a means of freeing her from the persecutions of her father, began now seriously to consider the question of eloping.

Eventually he abandoned the idea. In Germany the

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consequences of such an action would be very serious—for the girl, at any rate; and Schumann, unlike most musician lovers, was ever solicitous for his beloved's welfare. At last, however, as time went on, and Wieck's treatment of his daughter became more and more unfatherly and tyrannical, he decided that something really drastic must be done. Accordingly he wrote to Wieck, and told him that, unless the marriage should be approved immediately, he would institute legal proceedings, and appeal to a court of law to compel his consent.

In due course Schumann received an answer to this ultimatum. He would be pleased, Wieck said, to give his consent to the marriage; but only on certain conditions—mercenary, insolent conditions which neither Schumann nor Clara would consider for a minute. The latter, in fact, wrote herself to her father and told him so, candidly.

Then the lawsuit began—on July 16th, 1839. And for a whole long, weary year the proceedings were protracted. It is a dismal tale, the story of these happenings. Wieck defended the case relentlessly, leaving no stone unturned which might conceal something he could use to blacken Schumann's character, and availing himself of every device known to law and cunning to delay the giving of the verdict. It was not until August 12, 1840, that the Court at last pronounced a verdict in the lovers' favour—a verdict strongly in their favour.

Then all the troubles of anxiety and suspense

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were forgotten in a moment. The memories of the past faded completely; only to the future did the lovers look, doing everything within their power to hasten forward preparations for the wedding. And so it came about that, on September 12, Clara Wieck was made the wife of Robert Schumann. The ceremony was performed very quietly in the little church at Schoenefeld, a village near to Leipsic. But she and her husband had gained only one day by all their litigation, for on September 13th Clara came of age.

Still, they had gained one day. And perhaps even to have done that was worth the trouble. "It was a beautiful day," the bride wrote in her diary, "and the sun himself, who had been hidden for many days, poured his mild beams upon us as we went to the wedding, as if he would bless our union. There was nothing disturbing on this day, and so let it be inscribed in this book as the most beautiful and the most important day of my life. A period of my existence has now closed. I have endured very many sorrows in my young years, but also many joys which I shall never forget. Now begins a new life, a beautiful life, that life which one loves more than anything, even than self; but heavy responsibilities also rest upon me, and Heaven grant me strength to fulfil them truly and as a good wife."

And as a good wife indeed she did fulfil them. Marriage did not mark the end of Clara Wieck's romance. It was but the beginning of it, for hers and

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Robert Schumann's was an ideal union, a perfect marriage.

"They lived for one another," a biographer has written, "and for their children. He created and wrote for his wife, and in accordance with their temperament; whilst she looked upon it as her highest privilege to give to the world the most perfect interpretation of his works . . . and to ward off all disturbing or injurious impressions from his sensitive soul."

Now it was from this, his sensitive soul, that arose the only cloud which marred their married happiness. That cloud was the penalty of genius. Madness seized Schumann, madness in the form of melancholia. But even at those times when his depression was most acute his wife was still to him a "gift from above." And for her sake he fought fiercely against his malady—for her sake, and the sake of her children whom he also loved. Clara bore him eight, but even that did not satisfy. "I always tell my wife," he once wrote to Mendelssohn, "'one cannot have enough.' It is the greatest blessing we have on earth."

But mania, struggle though he would against it, in the end proved stronger than all his efforts. Periods of complete sanity, it is true, followed each attack, but as Schumann grew older, the attacks, alas! increased both in severity and frequency. In 1854, for example, so acute was his melancholy that one day in February he crept from the house unobserved and threw himself from a bridge into the Rhine. Fortunately he was

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seen to fall, and saved by some boatmen. But their prompt action only postponed the end for a short while.

Two years later, in fact, overburdened by the weight of his afflictions, the great musician passed peacefully away, peacefully and happy, for Death found him supported in Clara's loving arms.

Schumann was only forty-six years of age when he died. His wife survived him many, many years, and during those years, through the medium of her incomparable art, made the world appreciate, as she herself had done, the greatness of her lover's genius.

She did not marry again. Thenceforth she devoted her life and all her art entirely to Schumann's children and his memory, for she wrote, even so late as 1871, "the purity of his life, his noble aspirations, the excellence of his heart, can never be fully known except through the communication of his family and friends."

The Marriage of Victor Hugo



VICTOR HUGO

From an engraving

VI

THE MARRIAGE OF VICTOR HUGO

I

THESE pages have nothing to say concerning Victor Hugo's brilliant, though troublous, career, his political activities, his successes, his failures, or those many radical reforms he strove most earnestly to make in the interest of his fellow-countrymen; nothing concerning even his colossal literary greatness. Indeed, they do not presume in any way to give the story of the poet's life, but merely a chapter from that story—the chapter dealing with his love for Adèle Foucher, and that, incidentally, ends at the very point at which begins the story of his real career.

During his later years, after he had been caught in the whirligig of politics and fame, Victor Hugo, as was perhaps inevitable, became a somewhat exaggerated egotist, inconstant in his affections, and eccentric. But when he loved Adèle Foucher he was little more than a child, a child poet withal, unmarred even by the breath of cynicism, or knowledge of the baseness of the world. Not yet had genius demanded tribute of him; not yet had dawned within him the consciousness

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of his own stupendous talents. He was then in fact, and unknowingly, merely an idealist, seeking, through the medium of his art, to prove himself worthy of his own ideal, worthy of love.

Now human passion, besides being the one great theme of poets, is also the true source of all their inspiration. And they—they and musicians—alone among men can tell of it, for to them only is known love's language. The story of a poet's love, therefore, always is fascinating. But the story of that love which came to Victor Hugo in all the freshness of his innocence, to Victor Hugo, who, as a man, proved himself the greatest of France's poets, the greatest of all poets, perhaps, save only Shakespeare—how could it be aught but wonderful?

And surely it is more deserving of being re-told here than the story of that love which came to him later in life, a love built on the solid ground of reason and of judgment, and not merely of that charming, flimsy fabric, sweet sensation.

Now, Adèle Foucher was the very girl to inspire such a poet's fancy, for she was gifted not only with great beauty, but with that vague, mysterious fascination which stirs emotions and stimulates imagination. Hugo was never sure of her; throughout his long courtship the awful fear of losing her confronted him perpetually, ever goading him to fresh efforts to prove his worth and his devotion. Adèle seemed always to be escaping from his grasp, always elusive. In short,

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she possessed that infinite variety of charm of which not even time, not even familiarity, can rob some women. And it was because of this, because she won Hugo's respect and admiration, that she was able to retain his love.

The hunting instinct is strong in man. He hates an easy capture, even though the quarry be a woman.

Adèle and Victor were comrades together even in their cradle days. Indeed, at that time their respective parents had been close friends already for very many years. Madame Foucher and Madame Hugo, no doubt, each found in the other an admirable confidante and gossip, whilst the husbands, old General Hugo and M. Foucher, a retired official at the War Office, of course, had much in common. Thus, while the mothers chatted and the fathers re-fought old battles, the children of the two families grew up together side by side. And somehow—perhaps because there was a difference only of one year in their ages—Victor and Adèle always paired off together.

But they were never merely comrades. Victor was a dreamer even as a boy, always imagining. And something, it would seem, in Adèle's nature responded to his. Perhaps it was that she, too, loved to ramble and romance in the old-world garden around the Hugos' house—the Feuillantines they called it; once it had been a nunnery. At any rate, when quite a little child

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the poet noted "her large bright eyes, her abundant locks, her golden brown complexion, her red lips, and her pink cheeks."

"Our mothers," he wrote, "used to tell us to run and play together. We used to take walks instead. We were told to play, but we preferred to talk. We were children of the same age—not of the same sex. Nevertheless . . . we had little trials of strength. I took from her once, the biggest apple in the orchard ; I slapped her when she would not let me have a bird's nest.

"But before long the time came when she walked leaning on my arm, and I was proud, and experienced some new emotions. We walked slowly ; we spoke softly. She dropped her handkerchief ; I picked it up. Our hands touched each other, and trembled. She began to talk about the little birds, about the star over our heads, about the crimson afterglow of the sunset behind the trees, about her schoolmates, her frocks, her ribbons. We talked innocently of commonplace things ; yet we both blushed, for the little girl had grown a maiden."

And so, for a while, young love continued to pursue his happy, peaceful path, innocently and undisturbed. But in 1818, when Victor was sixteen and Adèle fifteen, trouble befell the Hugo household. The General and his wife, in fact, agreed to differ, and to live henceforth apart. The reason for their estrangement was mainly political, Madame Hugo's partisanship for the Bourbon

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cause having proved at length quite intolerable to her husband, a soldier who had fought valiantly and with distinction for the Empire.

But old Hugo found it utterly impossible, on his slender pension, to keep a house in Paris for himself and, at the same time, to maintain his wife and family at the Feuillantines. Accordingly, Madame Hugo was forced before long to move into a smaller *appartement* in the Rue des Petits-Augustins. But still she kept in touch with her old friend Madame Foucher. Indeed, she continued to call, every evening after dinner, at the Hôtel de Toulouse, where the Fouchers lived, with her work-bag in her hand, and wearing an old purple merino dress almost completely covered by an enormous shawl with a palm-leaf border.

And when they were home from school, her two sons, Eugène and Victor, always accompanied her. Eugène for his part, however, hated these family gatherings; he found them intolerably depressing. Who can wonder? The ladies would pass the time by knitting, and usually in silence, whilst M. Foucher, who invariably sat reading in a corner, hated to be disturbed.

And to disturb him was, as no doubt all who did it learned, a most unwise procedure, for the poor man suffered from insomnia, and, in consequence, usually was irritable. None the less, although in *bourgeoise* France in those days even big boys were expected to be seen and not heard, to sit dumb and doing

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absolutely nothing was the most wretched way imaginable of wasting an evening. So Eugène thought.

But Victor—"it was not that he enjoyed watching the wood fire on the hearth, or passing two long hours sitting still on a badly-stuffed chair. He did not care if there was not a word spoken. He was satisfied if M. Foucher did not look up from his book, or if the ladies were intent upon their sewing, for then he could look as long as he liked at Mlle Adèle."

In fact, he feasted his eyes upon her, and his ardent glances both pleased and puzzled her. The girl became curious to know their meaning. But Victor was much too shy to tell her. Nor, indeed, did he himself really understand them; he was only dimly conscious that some change was taking place within him.

Yet soon this silent adoration ceased to satisfy. Adèle now met his glances boldly; and in her eyes was a bewildering light, which thrilled the poet with a kind of ecstasy. He could endure the torment no longer. Nor could Adèle. And she—for like a true daughter of Eve, she knew how to arrange that things should happen—contrived to meet him alone one day.

It was April 26, 1819.

"I'm sure you have secrets, Victor," she said. "Come, what is your greatest secret? Tell me and I will tell you mine."

"I love you!" replied Hugo bluntly.

"And I love you!" came the dainty echo.

That was all—that and a timid kiss. It was very

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naïve, and there seemed to be no need for more. Indeed, neither had another word to say. They were merely children playing at romance. They called it love. Their elders would have called it folly. They knew this; and so were wise enough to keep their plighted troth a secret. The present was much too sweet to be marred by the needs of a remote to-morrow. A glance, a pressure of the hand, a kiss, a stolen meeting; this spelt romance indeed. And meanwhile, the meaning of love's great truth dawned gradually within them.

The winter now was over; and for the summer months the Fouchers, as was their wont, took a little house in the suburbs of Paris; this year at Issy. For a time, then, Adèle and Victor were forced to endure the torment of separation, for Issy, though not far from Paris, was too distant for Madame Hugo often to journey thither. Victor dared not go alone. To do so would at once betray his secret. Left, therefore, to fret and pine alone in Paris, he dreamed of Adèle every moment of the day. What was she doing? What frock was she wearing? Was she thinking of him? But the questions remained unanswered, tantalizing his imagination until :—

“Sweet inclination grew a quenchless flame.”

Love at last had explained itself to him; it ceased to be a plaything, and became now a great reality. And so, when Adèle returned to Paris in the autumn, she

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and Victor met no longer as girl and boy, but as man and woman, linked together by love's mysterious understanding.

And they met often; sometimes in the garden of the Hôtel de Toulouse, "under the chestnut trees," while Madame Foucher was out shopping; and sometimes, when Adèle was sent instead to do the marketing, in a little side-street, where they would converse long together. Even this was not enough. They wrote to one another every day, but, of course, secretly.

Now to Hugo, confident in the strength of his devotion and honourable intentions, these furtive letters and stolen meetings added greatly to the attractiveness of love, raising it, so he thought, to the high level of Romance. But to Adèle—and, maybe, because a certain respect for the proprieties is inherent and natural in every girl—this secrecy was hateful; she longed at least to be able to confide in her mother the knowledge of her love.

Still, she dared not do so, for she knew only too well the inevitable consequence. Indeed, one day, having discovered a book of verses sent by Hugo, Madame Foucher waxed quite angry, and cautioned her daughter severely against accepting even little attentions from a man—unless, of course, he should happen to be marriageable. If she did, the good lady sagely told her, she would lose that man's respect, and, if she lost that, she could never hope to keep his love.

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Now these words frightened Adèle. She had done wrong, she felt, in encouraging young Hugo, and in addition had brought dishonour on herself. And so, poor child, she was *greatly* troubled, so *greatly* that it was more even than her lover could do to reassure her.

And yet—"What can I tell you," he wrote, "that I have not told you a thousand and a thousand times? . . . To tell you that I love you better than my life would be a small matter, for you know I care very little for life. . . . I forbid you, do you hear, to say anything more to me about my '*contempt*,' my '*want of esteem*' for you. You will make me seriously angry if you force me to repeat that I could not love you if I did not esteem you . . . because I hope you know the purity of my love for you. I am your husband, or at least I consider myself as such. You only can make me give up that name. . . .

"Do you know that one thought makes three-quarters of my happiness? I dream that, in spite of all obstacles, I may be permitted yet to be your husband, even though it be only for one day. Suppose we were married to-morrow, and I were to kill myself the next day, I should have been happy for one day and no one would have any reason to reproach you. You would be my widow. Would it be possible, my Adèle . . . to arrange matters thus? One day of happiness is worth more than a life of sorrow."

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II

But even the felicity of a one-day marriage, it seemed, never could be consummated, for at this time a great misfortune befell the lovers.

It came about in this way.

Madame Foucher, her suspicions already aroused by the arrival of the little book of verses, began now to watch her daughter's movements closely. Suspicion, then, soon became a certainty, and she taxed the girl directly with questions. And Adèle, too much terrified even to attempt dissimulation, confessed everything. To her surprise, however, the confession did not anger her mother; on the contrary, Madame Foucher listened to it with sympathy, almost tenderness, and said that she would consider the matter, and consult about it with her husband.

This spelled joy to Adèle; and when M. Foucher expressed himself willing to look quite favourably on Victor's suit, she became full of hope. Her father even declared that he liked the boy, and believed in him. Indeed, being himself somewhat of a savant, M. Foucher, no doubt, already had formed a high opinion of the young poet's capabilities. Accordingly, on April 26, 1820—exactly one year after Victor and Adèle had told each other of their love—accompanied by his wife, he set out to call on Madame Hugo, intending to ratify the betrothal formally.

To Madame Hugo the news of her son's attachment

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came as an absolute surprise ; it overwhelmed her with astonishment. Victor in love ! Why, the boy was a mere child, she declared ; and she laughed at the cause of the Fouchers' untimely mission. None the less, in her heart she knew that what she had heard was true ; and could not restrain the note of disappointment in her laughter. That Victor, the son she idolized, should thus renounce her love, without one word of warning, for that of another woman, a mere girl too, and one without a *dot* at that ! It was unbelievable. Jealousy consumed her. Then the good woman lost her temper, closing her ears utterly to reason. Never, she said, never should the marriage ~~take place~~ place with her consent. A Foucher aspiring to wed the son of General Hugo, indeed ! Why, it was insult.

And, under the circumstances, of course, M. Foucher had no alternative other than to reply coldly. Pride forbade him to argue longer with the indignant mother, for, being a man who had held an important government position, and who wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honour, he and his family were in every respect equal to the Hugos socially. So he gave it to be understood that henceforth all intercourse between the two families must cease.

Forthwith, then, Victor was sent for, and informed of what had happened. The boy listened calmly. Loyalty to his mother restrained his protests. But when the Fouchers had taken their departure his feelings triumphed, and, tearing himself from his

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mother's embrace, he rushed to his room, locked the door, and wept till he had no more tears to shed. In vain Madame Hugo pleaded with him to allow her to come in and comfort him. He would not, for it was only now that he had lost Adèle, that he realized how much he loved her. He had lost her, lost her ; and life henceforth, he felt, would be merely a horrible and awful death. Grim despair entered his eighteen-year-old heart.

And Adèle—her mind, too, was in a whirl of doubts and fears, for she was kept in ignorance of what had happened. Her parents would tell her nothing, save that she must never expect again to hear from Victor, must never even mention his name, for, they declared, he had shown himself to be quite unworthy of her. They deemed it kinder to tell her this, and by such means hoped soon to help her to forget. With this aim in view, moreover, they tried even to arrange another marriage for her.

But Adèle did not forget ; she could not bring herself to believe that Victor had been false to her, even when the weeks rolled by, and still she heard neither from nor of him. In vain her mother tried to stimulate new interests and restore her happiness ; nothing could arouse the girl. Dances, parties, theatres seemed to have lost all their old charm and fascination for her. Only in seclusion was she happy, for there she could entertain at least the memory of Victor's love and read his letters. And his last letter to her, signed with his full name, she read and re-read.

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"Receive this, my inviolable promise, that I will have no other wife but thee. . . . They may possibly separate us, but I am thine—thine eternally.—V. M. HUGO."

She still had hope.

So, too, had Victor, after he had recovered from the first shock of disappointment. And in work he sought to realize his hope, for work could give him money, and money alone could give him that independence which would make marriage possible. Accordingly he set to work, and, moreover, did work, as only a lover can for whom the prize is the lady of his heart. Innumerable were his literary activities. And, at length, Fate gave him, so it seemed, an opportunity of pursuing his great quest directly.

M. Foucher published a book. True, it happened merely to be a treatise on army recruiting. None the less, it was a book. That was enough for Hugo. Undaunted, therefore, by its technicalities, he gave it a full-page review in *Le Conservateur Littéraire*, praising it as though it were a masterpiece of literature, a classic. Then in person he addressed to the author a copy of the journal containing the critique.

M. Foucher, of course, was inordinately flattered by this quite unmerited applause. But he had not the courage to relent towards Victor ; still he preserved his silence and his pride, failing even to acknowledge the poet's tribute. The latter, however, did not yet despair ; and when a few weeks later the Duc de Bordeaux was born—the royal child, *l'enfant du miracle*, whose birth

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France eagerly had been awaiting—he wrote an ode specially for the occasion, had it printed in pamphlet form, and sent a copy with a carefully worded dedication to M. Foucher. Adèle, he hoped, might also see it, and would understand perhaps the motives which had prompted him.

Now this time his hopes did not deceive him. In short, M. Foucher found it impossible longer to maintain pretence, for, although in no way deceived by Victor's compliments, he was not a little gratified by them, and felt he must at least make some acknowledgment. But he did not write to the boy personally; instead he wrote to the mother. "I have to thank V. M. Hugo," he said, "for his flattering article on the *Manuel du Recrutement*. I have also to thank him for sending me as a present a copy of his ode on the birth of the Duc de Bordeaux. My wife is a sharer in my debt, for she has taken half the pleasure we have had in this poem."

After this, friendly relations to some extent were renewed between the two families. Victor and Adèle, however, still were kept carefully apart; never were they allowed to meet—even in the presence of their parents.

In spite of this, they heard of each other's doings. So it came about that Victor learned that Adèle was taking drawing lessons. What is more, he learned where she was taking them, and when. The rest was easy. In short, he decided to lie in wait for her one morning, and then dared boldly to accost her in the street. And

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it was a happy day for him, was this, the day on which he saw his beloved again, and spoke to her, and found that she had not forgotten, nor even changed in her affection towards him. Despite, then, his adversities and trials, life to Hugo once again became worth living, for in future he and Adèle met often thus ; even the secret correspondence was renewed.

In this way another year rolled to its close, a year full of petty excitements and little fears.

"Do you remember, Adèle," the poet wrote on April 26, 1821, "that this day is the anniversary of that which determined my whole life? . . . Oh, tell me that you have not forgotten that evening. Tell me that you remember it all. My whole life has ever since been lived in the happiness or the sorrow which dated from that day. . . . Since then I only breathe, I only speak, I only move, I only act, thinking of you. . . . There is no other person in the world to me, except my mother. . . ."

And soon, there was only Adèle. On June 27 Madame Hugo died. Now Victor's affection for his mother was perhaps quite the most beautiful of his characteristics. Indeed, despite the misery she unwittingly had caused him, the boy literally adored her, and was ready always to do anything to gratify even her littlest wishes.

Hence, when, in the early days of May, Madame Hugo was taken seriously ill, Victor waived aside immediately all his obligations to little Adèle, devoting

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himself entirely to his mother. For two long months the poor woman suffered, and for two long months Victor nursed her unceasingly ; indeed during all this time he hardly left her bedside and neither saw nor wrote to Adèle once. Still, even this devotion proved unavailing. Madame Hugo's strength gradually but surely failed her, until at last she passed to a land where she had no more use for human aid, leaving her son alone and utterly disconsolate.

The boy's grief was quite immeasurable, for during those weeks while she had suffered he had learned to love and know his mother as never before he had known or loved her ; she had become very precious to him. He felt her loss keenly, therefore, and the more because the day which took her from him snapped the very last link between his home and him. His father long had been a stranger ; and his brothers—he knew but little of them ; they were quite indifferent to him.

What is more, that day snapped also, so it seemed, the last link between him and all that he held dear, for in the hour of his tribulation, Adèle, even Adèle, appeared to have forsaken him.

It was the day of his mother's funeral. The solitude and loneliness of the house oppressed him. At length he could endure it no longer ; he needed air, he felt. So in the darkness of the evening he went out. Fate, or maybe instinct, led him unconsciously in the direction of the Hôtel de Toulouse. He crossed the courtyard. "Some suggestion of the devil," he said,

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impelled him. In the corridor he heard the sound of music and of dancing. He ran up a back staircase. The noise of gaiety grew louder. He ascended higher and there, on the second floor, found a square of glass which looked into the ballroom. He put his burning face against it, and his eyes searched for Adèle. Then they found her.

"For a long time," he told her in a letter some time later, "your Victor, standing mute and motionless, wearing his funeral crape, looked at his Adèle in her ball-dress . . . and, dearest, it broke my heart!"

"If you had waltzed," he added, "I should have been lost. . . . But you did not waltz, and I took it for a sign that I might hope. I stood there a long time. I was present at the *fête* as a phantom may be present in a dream. There could be no *fête*, no joy for me; but my Adèle was enjoying a *fête*; she could share the joy of others! It was too much for me . . . just then I awoke to a sense of my own folly, and I slowly walked down the staircase which I had gone up without knowing if I should even come down alive. Then I went back to my house of mourning, and while you were dancing I knelt and prayed for you beside the bed of my poor dead mother."

III

But, when this happened, Adèle had not yet heard of Madame Hugo's death. Her parents purposely had kept the tidings from her; and bitterly she reproached

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them for their action. Had she only known, she told her lover later, she would have risked everything, and come to him immediately to share his sorrow.

These were glad words indeed ; they spelled infinite happiness to Hugo. And, when M. Foucher, repentant of his thoughtlessness, paid him a visit of condolence, again the boy's heart was filled with hope. So much so, in fact, that on July 15, when he heard that the Foucher family had left Paris to spend the summer months at Dreux, he himself dared boldly to follow them. Lack of funds made it necessary for him to journey all the way on foot, and it took him three days to reach his destination. But the result amply compensated him for the fatigue. Indeed, his energy and devotion met with an immediate reward, for, on the very day of his arrival, he met Adèle and her father walking in the town.

What a strange coincidence ! The poet assumed a delightful air of complete bewilderment, and, on returning to his lodgings, wrote M. Foucher an equally delightful letter. He had set out, he said, to pay a visit to a friend who lived between Dreux and Nonancourt, but, on finding his friend's house empty, had decided to rest for a few days at Dreux. This, surely, must have been a decree of Providence, for, he remarked, "I had the pleasure of seeing you to-day in Dreux, and I asked myself, could it be a dream.

"But," he added, "I should not be candid if I did not tell you that the unexpected sight of mademoiselle

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your daughter gave me great pleasure. I venture to say boldly that I love her with all the strength of my soul, and, in my complete isolation and my deep grief, nothing but thoughts of her can give me joy or pleasure."

How this letter must have made M. Foucher chuckle ! Still, it melted his heart also ; he liked Victor the more for his honest, ingenuous lies, and told him that in future he might meet Adèle occasionally in the presence of a third person—once a week, in fact, in the Luxembourg Gardens—on condition that the engagement should not be announced, or in any way made known, until he had placed his financial affairs on a surer basis ; and also on condition that he and Adèle should not under any circumstances write to one another.

This latter regulation, however, M. Foucher soon relaxed, since Hugo, forbidden to address letters to his beloved, sent instead passionate effusions to her father.

"The dearest thing I have at heart," he wrote, for example, on July 28, "is it not the happiness of mademoiselle your daughter ? If she can be happy without me, I will be ready to retire, though the hope of being hers some day is my sole trust and expectation."

Or again—this he wrote a few days later—"A little check will not annihilate great courage. I do not conceal from myself the uncertainties or even the possible dangers of the future ; but I have been taught by a brave mother that a man can master circumstances.

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Many men walk with uncertain steps upon firm ground ; a man who has a good conscience and a worthy aim should walk with a firm tread even on dangerous ground."

Now nothing, it seemed, could check these extravagant outbursts. The situation, therefore, soon became ridiculous ; and M. Foucher, overborne by the boy's persistence, like a wise man, yielded at last to the inevitable. Hugo, then, spurred on by this fresh success, became at once all energy, and set to work with renewed determination to get his affairs in order. Under no circumstances, he resolved, should the wedding be delayed much longer ; even should the obstacles be deemed insurmountable, he must overcome them somehow.

And—he asked Adèle—"Do not smile, dear love, at this enthusiasm. What creature in the world is more worthy than yourself to inspire it ? Oh, why do you not see yourself as you are, such as you appear to him whose adored companion you will be eternally !"

"For your Victor," he told her, "you are an angel, a spirit, a muse, a creature with only so much of human nature as may suffice to keep you within reach of the earthly and material being whose fate and whose lot you deign to share."

Yet, despite her willingness, despite even her parents' kindly attitude, there were still two obstacles for her lover to overcome before she could hope to share his lot. First, he must secure something in the shape of

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a regular income ; secondly, he must obtain his father's consent to the union. Without the latter he could not marry legally until he should attain the age of twenty-five ; without the former, he could never link himself to Adèle.

On this point M. Foucher was quite obdurate ; and his kinsfolk urged him to be obdurate also on the other. It was criminal, they maintained, for a father to allow his daughter to wait for her husband five whole years—the five best years of her life indeed. If the man to whom she was betrothed could not provide for her, the engagement should be broken off immediately, and one more suitable arranged. Hugo, they said, obviously had proved himself unworthy of Adèle.

Now these taunts hurt the susceptible young poet cruelly, and the more because, as a Frenchman, he could but admit the justice of them. Besides, when could come an end to the delay ? He knew not. When could he obtain his father's consent ? When would he have an independent income ? The questions were unanswerable ; and hope, even hope, provided only meagre comfort. Still, he implored Adèle to be patient, and to trust him. But “do not ask,” he begged, “how . . . I am confident of obtaining an independent subsistence, for I shall then be obliged to speak to you of a Victor Hugo . . . with whom your Victor is in no way desirous that you should make acquaintance.” An income, he said, would come to him somehow. It must.

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Nor did his brave determination prove unavailing, for at last that income came. In 1822, in fact, the Government tardily rewarded with a pension the poet's loyal service to the Bourbon cause—not a big pension, it is true; merely 1,200 francs a year, a sum which was reduced subsequently to a thousand. Still, it was a pension, and therefore sure. That was enough for Hugo.

"Adèle! my Adèle," he wrote, "I am wild with joy. . . . I had passed a week preparing myself to encounter a great misfortune, and happiness arrived instead!"

Now, then, it remained only for him to obtain the consent of General Hugo. But this he despaired of doing; his mind was in a turmoil of misgiving, for he regarded his father's opposition as inevitable. He dreaded even to ask the question, for should the answer be "No," there would be nothing for him to do other than to ask Adèle to wait until he should attain his legal majority, and then to marry him. But to this, he knew, her parents never would allow her to consent. Day by day, therefore, he postponed asking the fateful question. It was not until March 6 that he succeeded at last in mustering the necessary courage.

"This morning," he wrote to Adèle, "I sent off the letter which may lead to such important consequences. Let us both think seriously of them. Possibly, my Adèle, we are on the verge of one of the most important epochs in *our* lives. Forgive me for writing 'our lives,'

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and including you with me in a community of fate, when possibly I may make an end of myself, for I should do it at once the moment I found reason to fear it might not be for your happiness. . . .

“And yet,” he added, “things, possibly, may turn out well. It would not be the first time since I have loved you that my happiness seemed beyond hope. To have all turn out well is not probable, but it is not impossible. Dearest—my Adèle, forgive me for dreading misfortune after I had told you I was resigned. It was because my hopes were so precious, so sweet. We must wait.”

For three days they waited, four, five, a week. It was a period of hideous suspense. But at last the long-dreaded, eagerly-awaited letter came. With trembling fingers Hugo tore it open and, laying it out before him, read—read that which at first seemed too amazing to be true.

The General approved of his union to Adèle Foucher, approved gladly!

Instead of being angry, he begged his son's forgiveness. Three weeks after his first wife's death, he said, he himself had married again, had married, moreover, a woman for whose sake he feared he had almost broken the heart of Victor's mother. To see her son happy, therefore, was the wish of his heart, he now declared; and even the wish, he hoped, might possibly help him in some measure to make atonement for the past.

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For Victor, then, life suddenly became all sunshine. The clouds which long had darkened it vanished completely, and a wild joy filled him. "I am as happy," he told Adèle, "as it is possible . . . to be apart from you."

None the less, despite his exultation at the General's unexpected tractability, he was not unmindful of its cause. "This morning I answered my father's letter," he wrote to Adèle. "There were two things in it which gave me pain. He told me he had formed new ties. My mother might have read what I wrote to him this morning. My excitement did not make me altogether forget what I owed to her memory. You cannot blame me, my noble love. Besides, I hope we may yet be reconciled. I am his son, and I am your husband. All my duty is comprised in those two relationships."

And soon he was Adèle's husband more than in mere imagination. Nothing remained now which need delay the wedding. Forthwith, then, the date was fixed; and on October 12, the day agreed upon, and just two years and six months after that upon which they had confessed to one another the secret of their love, Victor Hugo and Adèle Foucher became man and wife.

"Do not doubt, dear love," the poet wrote shortly before the wedding, "that we have a special destiny in life. We have that rare intimacy of the soul which constitutes the happiness of heaven and earth. Our approaching marriage will be only the public consecration

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of another marriage, that ideal marriage of our hearts, of which God alone has been the author, the confidant and the witness."

.

But, alas! this the marriage did not prove to be. Adèle, it is true, remained always a faithful, loving wife. Victor, however—but why speak of him? Adèle did not complain; she had married a genius, and bravely she faced the consequence.

Besides, the sweet memory of her courtship was perhaps enough in itself to leaven her whole life.

Sir Richard and Lady Burton



SIR RICHARD BURTON
IN NATIVE DRESS

VII

SIR RICHARD AND LADY BURTON

I



A BOLD novelist indeed, he who would dare to tax the imagination of his readers with a tale like this, a tale so strange, uncanny, inexplicable. •Not even could fantasy be more fantastic. In fact, like the story of his life, the story of Sir Richard Burton's marriage would be quite incredible were it not true. And the story of his life—has ever man lived more amazingly? Has ever another European, shrewd with the wisdom of the West, understood, as he did, the occult mysticism of the East? No! surely no. And, as an explorer, even Livingstone cannot take precedence.

Nor was the woman whom he married one whit less noteworthy. Any woman might have won Sir Richard's love; no other woman could have kept it. That she did keep it is not the least of her accomplishments.

But Isabel Burton did more than this. She became a part, an essential part, of her husband's very being. A wonderful man he may have been; she most certainly was a wonderful woman, so primitive, so mysterious, so noble withal that it is hard to

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believe she lived in the exact and prosaic nineteenth century.

By birth she belonged to one of the proudest and most ancient houses in all England. She was an Arundell of Wardour. And :—

“ Ere William fought and Harold fell
There were Earls of Arundell.”

And they were a fine race of men, too, these Arundells. Their valiant deeds, loyalty, and fearless courage claim many pages in the records of romance and chivalry. But Isabel, perhaps, was the rarest flower of them all.

She was born in London in March, 1831, at a house in Great Cumberland Place, near to the Marble Arch. As a child, she was much like other children; and not until she was sixteen years of age did her mind begin to develop along its own peculiar lines. She then left school and went to live at her parents' home in Essex. Here she had liberty, liberty to gratify the love of adventure which was innate in her; liberty, moreover, to commune with Nature, and enjoy that sense of space and freedom for which she craved. And her mind developed rapidly. Isabel was no mere 'tom-boy,' but a dreamer, a thinker. The spirit of the East was strong within her. She loved solitude. The occult and mystic had a curious fascination for her. Gipsies attracted her irresistibly.

“ Wild asses,” she declared, “ would not have kept

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me out of the camps of the Oriental, yet English-named, tribes of Burton, Cooper, Stanley, Osbaldiston, and another tribe whose name I forget." Nor indeed could they. Despite stern orders from her parents to the contrary, she visited gipsy camps whenever subtlety or chance would let her. And gipsies loved her, nay, adored her ; to them, the child, in all the loveliness of her girlhood, seemed like some fairy queen, whose special destiny was to watch over and protect them.

Her particular friend was a certain Hagar Burton, a tall, handsome woman who had much influence in her tribe, and to whom Isabel rendered many little services. Once the gipsy cast the girl's horoscope. She wrote in Romany, but, translated, her curious prophecies read thus :—

"You will cross the sea, and be in the same town with your Destiny, and know it not. Every obstacle will rise up against you, and such a combination of circumstances, that it will require all your courage, energy, and intelligence to meet them. Your life will be like one swimming against big waves ; but God will be with you, so you will always win. You will fix your eyes on your Polar Star, and will go for that without looking right or left. You will bear the name of our tribe, and be right proud of it. You will be as we are, but far greater than we. Your life is all wandering, change and adventure. One soul in two bodies, never long apart. Show this to the man you take for your husband.—HAGAR BURTON."

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But the gipsy had seen far into the future. For a while, Isabel was destined to lead the life for which birth had qualified her. She had a place to fill in the world of society, and, in spite of her wild, imaginative nature, was not insensible to her duties. In 1849, therefore, she made her *début* in London. And the Duchess of Norfolk, who played the part of fairy god-mother, had every reason to be proud of her *protégée*, the dazzling girl who bewitched immediately that magic world surrounded by the walls of Fashion.

No wonder men admired her. Her wit, her beauty, her originality assured her of success, making her appear in striking contrast to the bored, artificial, husband-seeking girls around her. Isabel frankly enjoyed her pleasures. That was what she had come to London for. Nor had she any thoughts of matrimony.

Indeed, for the men she met she had neither respect nor admiration. The little gods of society, for whom these other women pined, to her were merely play-things. "Manikins," she called them; "animated tailors' dummies!" "'Tis man's place," she said, "to do great deeds!" And yet, she wrote, "I met some very odd characters, which made one form some useful rules to go by. One man I met had every girl's name down on paper, if she belonged to the *haute volée*, her age, her fortune, and her personal merits; for, he said, 'One woman, unless one happens to be in love with her, is much the same as another.' He showed me my name down, thus: 'Isabel Arundell, eighteen, beauty, talent

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and goodness, original. Chief fault, £0 os. od. . . .’ Then he rattled on to others. I told him I did not think much of the young men of the day. ‘There, now,’ he answered, ‘drink of the spring nearest you, and be thankful. By being fastidious you will get nothing.’”

But Isabel refused to drink of the nearest spring. Her ideal was not to be found in this world of society. Unless she could marry the man of her imaginings, she would marry nobody. This she determined. So vividly was that man’s portrait engraven in her mind that she found time, even amid the whirl and gaiety of the season, to describe him.

“As God took a rib out of Adam,” she told her diary, “and made a woman, so do I, out of a wild chaos of thought, form a man unto myself.”

Thus she wrote of him :—

“My ideal is about six feet in height, he has not an ounce of fat on him ; he has broad and muscular shoulders, a deep, powerful chest ; he is a Hercules of manly strength. He has black hair, a brown complexion, a clever forehead, sagacious eyebrows, large, black wondrous eyes—those strange eyes you dare not take yours off from—with long lashes. He is a soldier and a *man* ; he is accustomed to command, and to be obeyed. He frowns on the ordinary affairs of life, but his face always lights up warmly for me. In his dress he never adopts the fopperies of the day. But his clothes suit him ; they

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are made for him, not he for them. . . . Of course, he is an Englishman. His religion is like my own—free, liberal, and generous-minded. He is by no means indifferent on the subject, as most men are, and even if he does not conform to any church, he will serve God from his innate duty and sense of honour. . . . He is a man who owns something more than a body. He has a head and a heart, a mind and a soul. . . .

“Such a man only will I wed! . . . If I find such a man, and afterwards discover that he is not for me, I will never marry. . . . I will become a sister of charity of St. Vincent de Paul.”

II

But she did find such a man, and sooner than, even in her wildest dreams, she had dared to hope. It happened at Boulogne; the Arundells repaired thither at the close of the London season, for Boulogne in those days was a favourite place of refuge for impoverished gentlefolk. She saw him walking on the sea front. In appearance he tallied to the littlest detail with the hero of her visions.

“He looked at me,” she wrote afterwards, “as though he read me through and through in a moment, and started a little. I was completely magnetized; and when we got a little distance away I turned to my sister, and whispered to her, ‘That man will marry me.’ The next day he was there again, and followed us, and

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chalked up 'May I speak to you?' leaving the chalk on the wall. So I took it up and wrote back, 'No; mother will be angry.' And mother found it, and was angry."

But in the hands of Destiny conventions count as nothing. And it happened that, a few days later, there arrived at Boulogne some cousins of the Arundells who knew this mysterious stranger. Isabel met them one morning walking with him on the sea front, and they formally introduced him to her. '

The man's name was Burton.

Then Isabel remembered the words of Hagar, the gipsy—"You will bear the name of our tribe, and be right proud of it." And remembrance made her dumb. For a while, silent and stupefied, she stood before this man named Burton, whose piercing, gipsy eyes seemed to read into her very soul. Then he made some commonplace remark and left her; the twain going their respective ways.

Now Richard Burton was ten years older than Isabel, and already had served, and served with distinction, for several years in India, first in a regiment of native infantry, and, later, on Sir Charles Napier's staff. During this time he had devoted his energies unceasingly to the study of Oriental languages and Oriental customs, and in consequence had earned for himself the nickname "the white nigger."

Nor was the title intended as a compliment, for Burton being one of those masterful men who try to

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ride roughshod over such rules as are laid down by society, had not made himself popular in India. His fellow-officers detested him.

Disgusted, therefore, with the treatment they accorded him, he applied for furlough, and in 1850 returned to England. Thence he crossed the Channel to join his parents at Boulogne. And at Boulogne, as has been shown already, he met Isabel.

Still, the acquaintance thus begun ripened but slowly. The man did not thrust his society upon the girl. On the contrary, he seemed deliberately to avoid her, and to do his utmost to offend her by his contempt for the conventions, as already he had offended the majority of the English colony in the town. Hence, when, in 1852, the Arundells at length returned to England, Isabel and he parted merely as friends.

To the girl it was a sad day, this day of parting. Her ideal had taken shape ; she had seen him ; she had spoken to him, and in spite of all, had learned to love him with a love which overwhelmed her, and which she could no more suppress than she could suppress her nature.

And so, with an awful sorrow in her heart she fixed her eyes on the fading coast of France, as every minute the ship, ploughing its way relentlessly across the Channel, widened the distance between her and the land which held her happiness. She might never again meet Burton. It was this which terrified her, for she knew him to be a homeless wanderer, here to-day, gone

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to-morrow. How could she hope to meet him then? And, without him, what could life be to her? Merely a hideous emptiness.

Yet only into her diary did she pour the full anguish of her heart. "Richard may be a delusion of my brain," she wrote. "But how dull is reality! What a curse is a heart! With all to make me happy I pine and hanker for him, my other half, to fill this void, for I feel as if I were not complete. Is it wrong to want some one to love more than one's father and mother; some one, on whom to lavish one's best feelings? . . . I cannot marry any of the insignificant beings around me.

"Where are those men who inspired the *grandes passions* of bygone days? Is the race extinct? Is Richard the last of them? Even so, is he for me? . . . I could not live like a vegetable in the country . . . nor . . . marry a country squire, nor a doctor, nor a lawyer (I hear the parchment crackle now), nor a parson, nor a clerk in a London office. God help me!

"A dry crust, privations, pain, danger for him I love would be better. Let me go with the husband of my choice to battle, nurse him in his tent, follow him under the fire of ten thousand muskets. . . . If Richard and I never marry, God will cause us to meet in the next world; we cannot be parted; we belong to one another. Despite all I have said of false, foolish, weak attachment, unholy marriages, the after-life of which is rendered unholier still by struggling against the inevitable, still I believe in the one true love that binds

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a woman's heart faithful to one man in this life, and, God grant it, in the next.

"All this I am and could be for one man. But how worthless should I be to any other man but Richard Burton! I should love Richard's wild, roving vagabond life; and as I am young, strong, and hardy, with good nerves, and no fine notions, I should be just the girl for him. . . ."

III

And Burton knew this. Already he had made up his mind to marry Isabel, for he was one of those men who determine on a course of action, assuming its accomplishment. But of this Isabel knew nothing. For four long years she was forced to stifle all her hopes, and, in their place, graciously to receive the attentions of London dandies, to dance with them, to drink tea with their mothers, to talk scandal with their sisters. Oh, how she hated it! For four long years—and during that time, never a word did she hear from Burton.

But he was merely testing the opinion he had formed of her, and, in the meanwhile, making his memorable pilgrimage to Mecca, a venture of amazing daring. Such a thing no European ever yet had done, or even thought of as being possible. Only faithful Mussulmans are allowed to gain admittance to the inmost sanctuary of Islam, and to that shrine where the coffin of Mohammed hangs between earth and heaven.

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And, of course, it was as a Mussulman that Burton journeyed, living the life proper to his disguise, eating the food, conforming to the ritual, joining in the prayers and sacrifices. Even so, every moment held its dangers ; one mistake, one prayer unsaid, one hasty word would have led surely to detection. And then—the consequence is too hideous to contemplate ; a few white bones scattered on the desert sand, not more would have been left of the dog of an infidel who had dared profane the sanctuary of Mecca.

But Burton made no mistakes. In safety he returned to Aden. Then, when the news of his astonishing achievement began gradually to be noised abroad, England was dumbfounded with amazement ; the man's name was on the lips of everybody. And Isabel—she was very proud and very happy ; Burton, she felt, belonged to her, and she chronicled his every movement in her diary ; longing to congratulate him on his triumph ; counting the seconds till he could return, and she might welcome him.

But Burton did not return. From Egypt he went to India, back to his regiment. In her heart Isabel was glad of this ; she did not like to think of him as being shunned by men, but still, "Is there no hope for me?" she asked ; "I am so full of faith. Is there no pity for so much love? . . . How swiftly my sorrow followed my joy ! I can laugh, dance and sing as others do, but there is a dull gnawing always at my heart that wearies me."

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Not even when he left India did Burton come back to England. Instead he went to Somaliland; "a deadly expedition," wrote Isabel, "or a most dangerous one; and I am full of sad forebodings." Nor did they remain unfulfilled. In Somaliland Burton was wounded, and wounded so badly that he had perforce to return to England to recover of his hurt. But he did not stay long. Nor did he give Isabel even an opportunity of seeing him. In 1854, in fact, so soon as he was strong enough, he set out for the Crimea, and there, as a member of General Beatson's staff, busied himself organizing irregular cavalry—the famous Bashi-bazouks.

And Isabel, how she longed to join him at the seat of war! "It has been a terrible winter in the Crimea," she wrote in her diary. "I have given up reading 'The Times,' it makes me so miserable, and one is so impotent. I have made three struggles to be allowed to join Florence Nightingale . . . I have written again and again . . . but the superintendent has answered me that I am too young and inexperienced, and will not do."

In 1855, however, Sebastopol fell. Then Burton returned to England. Isabel was wild with excitement. "I hear that Richard has come home, and is in town," she wrote. "God be praised!"

Yet days passed into weeks; weeks into months, and still she neither saw nor heard from him. Had he forgotten her? Fear mingled with her other sorrows.

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She knew that he was busy preparing for another expedition. But did this alone explain his silence? Had he no thoughts for her? Had she loved in vain? Had she? Had she? Surely Richard Burton was her Destiny. Surely—but oh, why did he not come and claim her? She could not understand his silence.

Then, in the following June, as she was arriving at Ascot racecourse, she noticed Hagar Burton standing among the crowd which thronged the gates. Greatly excited—this indeed, she thought, must be an omen—Isabel leaned out of the carriage and strove to make the gipsy see her. But there was no need for this; Hagar had seen already, and was hastening towards the carriage.

“Are you Daisy Burton yet?” she asked.

Isabel shook her head. “Would to God I were!” she exclaimed.

“Patience,” said the gipsy; “it is coming.”

Just then an attendant thrust the woman from the carriage, and Isabel could hear no more. Still, she had heard enough perhaps—enough at any rate to make her happy.

Two months later it came.

It happened in this wise. While walking in the Botanical Gardens with her sister one August morning, Isabel suddenly found herself face to face with Burton. Immediately she stopped. He stopped too. They shook hands, and stood for a while talking about old times. Then Burton asked if she went often to the Gardens.

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"Oh, yes," replied Isabel, "we come and read and study here from eleven till one ; it is so much nicer than studying in a hot room."

"That is quite right," Burton remarked. "And what is the book ?"

She showed it to him. It was Disraeli's "Tancred." Burton just glanced at it; then he looked at Isabel, "a peculiar look," she called it, such as he had given her at Boulogne.

On the next morning she went to the Gardens again. Burton she found already there. He was sitting alone, writing poetry. But, so soon as he saw Isabel, he rose and joined her. For a long while they walked together through the Gardens.

On the following morning they met again ; and on the next. In fact, these daily meetings continued for a fortnight.

Then, one morning, gently stealing his arm around her waist, Burton pulled Isabel towards him and laid his cheek on hers.

"Could you do anything so sickly as to give up civilization ?" he asked. "And if I can get the consulate at Damascus, will you marry me and go and live there ?"

Isabel made as though to speak. But Burton restrained her. "Do not give me an answer now," he said ; "you must think it over."

For a moment there was silence. Then Isabel found her voice, and in a torrent of words poured forth

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all her pent-up feelings. "I do not want to think it over," she said. "I have been thinking it for six years, ever since I first saw you at Boulogne. I have prayed for you every morning and night; I have followed your career minutely; I have read every word you ever wrote, and I would rather have a crust and a tent with you than be queen of all the world; and so I say now, Yes! Yes! Yes!"

And then, in the ecstasy of that first embrace, Burton knew for certain what really he had known six years before. There was one woman, one woman only, in all the world for him. And now he had found her. He, too, had waited with longing for that moment. But, "Your people will not give you to me," he said at length.

"I know that," replied Isabel, "but I belong to myself—I give myself away!"

Burton nodded, and his face grew hard and stern.

"That is right," he said, "be firm and so shall I."

IV

None the less, Burton proposed, for the present, to keep his love a secret. He had reason; in fact, he was then engaged planning an expedition to Central Africa, and expected to leave England in the autumn. How long he would be away he knew not—perhaps two years, perhaps three years, perhaps four; three at least, he thought; and, until he should return, it seemed that

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nothing could be gained by announcing the engagement, for until then he could not think of marrying.

Opposition to the marriage was inevitable. Isabel knew this. A premature announcement of the engagement, therefore, would only serve to make those years of waiting, at the best, anxious years for Isabel, years of torment. Besides, the few weeks of happiness which still remained were much too precious to be marred by opposition and hostile criticism.

And how quickly those short weeks fled. September passed like lightning. October was soon upon them. On the 5th of the month Burton was to sail; he arranged to meet Isabel secretly on the 4th to say "good-bye." On the afternoon of the 3rd he called formally to bid the Arundells adieu. They asked him to join their party at the theatre that evening. He thanked them, and said that he would try, but that he was very busy, and might possibly be detained.

Then he took his leave. And Isabel, running to the balcony, waved to him as he passed down the street and turned the corner. For a moment his shadow wavered. Then he was gone. And Isabel went back into the room little thinking that three long years must pass before again she would see him. Had he not arranged to meet her, at any rate, on the morrow?

"I went to the theatre that evening," she wrote, "quite happy, and expected him. At 10.30 I thought I saw him at the other side of the house, looking into our box. I smiled, and made a sign for him to come. I

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then ceased to see him ; the minutes passed, and he did not come. Something cold struck my heart, I felt I should not see him again, and I moved to the back of the box, and, unseen, the tears streamed down my face."

Once home again she went straight to her room. But sleep she could not ; she lay on her bed, restless and feverish, consumed by a hundred doubts and fears. What had happened ? What had happened ? She felt that she must know immediately ; she could not wait until the morning. Then, overcome with weariness, she dozed. But only for a minute ; suddenly she started up. Burton was near her ; she was conscious of his presence. She groped around her, but touched nothing ; and yet, so it seemed, she could feel his arms around her.

Then he spoke to her : "I am going now, my poor girl," he said. "My time is up, and I have gone, but I will come again—I shall be back in less than three years. I am your Destiny." He pointed to the clock by her bedside. She noticed the hour. It was two o'clock. For a while he gazed silently at her with his gipsy eyes ; then he laid a letter on the table. "That is for your sister," he said, "not for you."

Suddenly the vision faded.

But was it merely a vision ? Isabel sprang out of bed, and hastened to the door. She could see nothing ; all was darkness. Yet still she trembled like a leaf. She dared not enter her room again. Instead, she

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roused one of her brothers, and confided in him all her secret. He listened sympathetically and tried to console her with brotherly consolation. "A nightmare," he said, "it was that lobster you had for supper."

Isabel knew better. And she sat all the night in her brother's room. At eight o'clock in the morning the post arrived. No letter came for her; but there was one for Blanche, her sister—from Burton too. He asked her to tell Isabel of his departure; he had found it necessary, he said, to leave England without delay, and secretly, lest he should be detained as witness in a certain lawsuit. He apologized for having failed to join their party at the theatre, but he had found it quite impossible to do so.

And why? Because at 10.30, when Isabel had seen him gazing at her in the theatre, he left his lodgings in London; because at two o'clock, when Isabel heard his voice saying farewell to her, he set sail from Southampton on his way to Africa.

"There are more things in . . ." But then, this happening no man's philosophy could understand, much less Horatio's.

But Burton had gone. This was the thought which throbbed and throbbed through Isabel's distracted brain. Burton had gone, and left her alone, again to wait. For six years already she had waited; then had come only that one brief spell of happiness; now solitude

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again, a very lonely, anxious solitude. Hope, it is true, she had now to comfort her ; no longer did she love unasked.

Still, it was very hard to wait, harder perhaps than hitherto, for the woman at any rate. Before the man lay a life of activity, danger and adventure. But she—she had naught to do save think, and fret, and fear. And for three long years at least she must remain thus in a state of hideous uncertainty. Nor could she even talk of her troubles, for until Burton should return his secret must remain a secret. This he had demanded of her. And she had promised.

But would he ever return ? Who could tell ? Countless dangers lay before him. To find the fabled sources of the Nile—that was his mission. And the path to his goal lay through an unknown land, a land which white man never yet had crossed. It was a perilous journey. But Isabel gladly would have made it with him.

Why had he not let her ? Bravely she would have shared his difficulties and fatigues—despite her sex ; she longed for the taste of danger and adventure.

“I wish I were a man,” she wrote : “if I were, I would be Richard Burton. But as I am a woman, I would be Richard Burton’s wife. I love him purely, passionately and devotedly. . . . I have given my every feeling to him, and kept back nothing for myself or the world ; and I would this moment sacrifice and leave all to follow his fortunes, were it his wish, or for his good.”

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Oh, why then had he not asked her? For the sound of his dear voice, "with all its devilry," she would now have given gladly, she told her diary, years of her life. Alas, however, not only the voice, even the pen was dumb. News perforce came rarely, and such as came was very scant. Burton's road lay through wild parts; he had but few facilities for posting. Besides, to write often would be dangerous; letters might reach hands other than those for which they were intended. And Isabel knew this; she understood the reason of his silence. None the less, she listened eagerly for every post, and not even time could cure her of the sickening sense of disappointment which she felt when nothing came.

Still she did not bewail her fate, or brood. Courage was the birthright of an Arundell. And, in some degree, at any rate, the horoscope cast in the days of her childhood had prepared her for this sorrow. "Your life," Hagar the gipsy had said "will be like one swimming against big waves." And such indeed it had proved itself. So Isabel fixed her eyes on her Polar Star, and moved towards it, looking neither to right nor left.

"No gilded misery for 'me,'" she wrote. "I was born for love, and require it as air and light. Whatever harshness the future may bring, he has loved me, and my future is bound up in him with all consequences."

In August, 1857, she set out, with Blanche, her married sister, on a prolonged tour through Europe. This

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broke the weary monotony of waiting. And Isabel enjoyed every moment of her travels. Only one thing was wanting to make her happiness complete, only Richard. His absence was the chord upon which, in her diary, she harped incessantly. "I am told there is no land between us and Tunis," she wrote at Nice—"three hundred miles—and that when the sirocco comes the sand from the great desert blows across the sea on to our windows. We have an African tree in our garden. And Richard is in Africa."

At Genoa she received good news. A letter from Burton! He might be able to return to England in the following June. But this was meagre consolation. "It makes me quite envious," she wrote, "to see my sister and her husband. I am all alone, and Richard's place is vacant in the opera box, in the carriage, and everywhere. Sometimes I dream he came back and would not speak to me, and I wake up with my pillow wet with tears." And even in Switzerland, the land of her dreams, even there, on the snow-clad mountains, she looked for Burton. Never for a moment could she banish his image from her mind.

Now in Switzerland she received two proposals of marriage, one from a Russian general, the other from a wealthy American, "polished, handsome, fifty years of age, a widower, with £300,000 made in California." But she gave serious consideration to neither of these offers. "There is only one man in the world," she declared, "who could be master of such a spirit as

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mine. People may love (as it is called) a thousand times, but the real *feu sacré* only burns once in one's life. Perhaps some may feel more than others ; but it seems to me that this love is the grandest thing in this nether world, and worth all the rest put together. . . . If any woman wants to know what this *feu sacré* means, let her ascertain whether she loves fully and truly with brain, heart and passion. If one iota is wanting in the balance of any of those three factors, let her cast her love aside as a spurious article—she will love again ; but if the investigation is satisfactory, let her hold it fast, and let nothing take it from her. For let her rest assured love is the one bright vision Heaven sends us in this wild, desolate, busy, selfish earth to cheer us on to the goal."

And such a love Isabel indeed had found. She had met her affinity—the man who at that time, in the company of Speke, was fighting his way fearlessly through the jungles of Central Africa. It was a wonderful achievement, that journey, true to the noblest traditions of British daring ; and Burton's genius inspired it.

But Burton did not reap the credit ; disgrace was the only prize he gained. Ofttimes the world thus rewards her heroes. The facts of the case are controversial. They cannot be stated here. 'But this truth remains—when Burton came back to England in '59, he found Speke, who had returned twelve days before him, the hero of the hour, and himself an object of suspicion and of scorn. He had expected honour, but found only dishonour. He was notoriously unlucky.

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VI

But had he not told Isabel to expect him in the June of '58? Yes—nor had he contradicted this report. Eagerly, therefore, she had waited for him, but in vain. June, July, August—slowly the months rolled by; yet still he came not. The suspense was terrible. September, October, November—and never a word did she receive from him; even Christmas brought no news. Gradually hope faded from her heart; Burton must be dead, she thought; and a great despair seized hold of her.

During Lent, therefore, she retired into a Retreat in the Convent at Norwich, there to prepare herself for the future. Unless she could marry Burton, she would become a nun. This she had sworn long ago. Perhaps, too, in religion she might find consolation.

At Easter she left her retreat for a while, and decided to visit her parents in London. And in London she heard news of Speke. He had just returned to England; the air was full of the story of his achievements. But Burton, so rumour said, had decided to stay indefinitely in Zanzibar; and rumour said other things as well, hideous, ugly things which Isabel could not, would not believe, for she knew them to be untrue.

The Burton whom she loved was a gentleman, the soul of chivalry and honour; and she longed for him to return and publicly deny these wicked libels. Yet still he came not. He was alive, however. That was something. But why did he not return to her?

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What had happened? Why did he not even write? What did it all mean? Isabel was beside herself.

Then came a letter. It was long overdue, but characteristic of the man, only a few lines of verse :—

TO ISABEL

“ That brow which rose before my sight,
As on the palmer’s holy shrine ;
Those eyes—my life was in their light ;
Those lips—my sacramental wine ;
That voice whose flow was wont to seem
The music of an exile’s dream.”

Then he did still care. Nothing else now mattered. An ineffable joy flooded Isabel’s heart; yes, and a curious misgiving also. “ I feel strange,” she wrote in her diary on the 21st of May, “ frightened, sick, stupefied, dying to see him, and yet inclined to run away, lest, after all I have suffered and longed for, I should have to bear more.” But she did not run away. Nor surely could she have escaped from Burton, even had she wished. The man was her Destiny.

On the following day, May 22, it happened that she decided to call upon a friend. Her friend was not at home, but, said the maid, would be in for tea; would Miss Arundell, therefore, wait?

“ Yes,” she replied; and was shown into the drawing-room.

A few minutes later the door-bell rang again. Another visitor—a man; he, too, was asked to wait. Then she

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heard him speak; he was coming up the stairs. "I want Miss Arundell's address," he said. And it was impossible to mistake the voice. The door slowly opened. Isabel's mind reeled; and she stood in the middle of the room, trembling but powerless to move. So Burton found her.

"For an instant we both stood dazed," she wrote afterwards. "I felt so intensely that I fancied he must hear my heart beat, and see how every nerve was overtaxed. We rushed into each other's arms. I cannot attempt to describe the joy of that moment. He had landed the day before, and had come to London, and had called here to know where I was living, where to find me. . . . We forgot all about my hostess and her tea. We went downstairs, and Richard called a cab and he put me in and told the man to drive about—anywhere."

But he was a very different-looking man, this Richard, from the Burton Isabel had known of old. "He had had twenty-one attacks of fever, had been partially paralysed and partially blind. He was a mere skeleton, with brown-yellow skin hanging in bags, his eyes protruding, and his lips drawn away from his teeth. . . . He was sadly altered; his youth, health, spirits, and beauty were all gone for the time."

Still, one thing he had not lost—a woman's loyalty; that nothing could shake. "Never did I feel the strength of my love," Isabel wrote, "as then. He returned poorer, and dispirited by official rows and

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every species of annoyance ; but he was still—had he been ever so unsuccessful, and had every man's hand against him—my earthly god and king, and I could have knelt at his feet and worshipped him. I used to feel so proud of him ; I used to like to sit and look at him, and think, ' You are mine, and there is no man on earth the least like you.' ”

But not even yet had her troubles ended. Now that Burton proceeded formally to seek her hand, Mrs. Arundell began to oppose the suit determinedly, and not without reason.

In after-years, even Isabel admitted her mother's hostility to have been justified. In the first place, as a member of a staunchly Roman Catholic family, it was only natural that Mrs. Arundell should wish her child to marry a man who shared that faith. Yet she was not so bigoted a woman as to make religion an obstacle to happiness. Had Burton been a Protestant, had he even conformed to any Church, she would have welcomed him as a son-in-law. She liked him ; he interested her. But, she maintained, to allow Isabel to marry a man who had no religion, who was frankly an agnostic, would not merely be wrong but criminal. There could be but one result from such a union—tragedy ; and that, at all cost, must be prevented.

Besides, Mrs. Arundell, too, had heard vague rumours which were not to Burton's credit ; they troubled her. He might be a fascinating man and clever—he was ;

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she did not attempt to deny it—but would he make a good husband? That was the important question.

And then again, Isabel had lived all her life in comfort, if not in luxury. But what could Burton offer her? He had no private means, and neither the War Office nor the Government regarded him with favour. Apparently he had no prospects for the future. This was a very serious consideration; she could not allow her daughter to be sacrificed, for Isabel was an attractive girl, and there were many men willing, nay, anxious, to marry her, men of position and of means.

In disapproving of the marriage, then, Mrs. Arundell acted merely as a good mother should. None the less she might surely have seen the futility of opposition; how truly, during those years of waiting, Richard and Isabel had proved their love.

Besides, neither of them was a child. This, too, she forgot. Burton, in fact, was more than forty, Isabel nearly thirty years of age. Surely then, they were old enough to choose for themselves. So Burton declared. But Isabel knew not what to say. She adored her mother, and hated the idea of acting contrary to her wishes. And thus, while she wavered between love and duty, another lingering year elapsed.

To Burton this state of affairs proved utterly intolerable. Delay, interference, he could brook neither; his was not a sympathetic nature. Isabel, then, he said, must make up her mind one way or the other; if she wanted him, she must marry him; if not, she must

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release him. He wrote to her to this effect in April, 1860. He was going away, he added, on a visit to Salt Lake City, the Mormon stronghold; he would be absent for nine months. On his return she must decide immediately between her mother and himself. And without another word, he sailed.

But Isabel—this was more than she could bear. Her nerves, long overtaxed, now broke down completely beneath the weight of all her sorrows. For several weeks she lay ill, very ill. Then she rallied bravely. No woman ever possessed more indomitable pluck. With convalescence came resolve; and with resolve came happiness. No longer would she contend against the inevitable; no longer would she hesitate. Her purpose lay clear before her; whatever might be the consequence, she would marry him now—the man she idolized—so soon as he returned to claim her.

But Burton was a poor man. She must fit herself, then, to be a poor man's wife, and to live the life that he lived. Again, he was a born adventurer; his castle a tent, his park the illimitable desert. His wife, then, must not allow herself to be a hindrance to him; she must be a true helpmate. This Isabel saw clearly. And she was glad. At last she had found a something to achieve. And so, on the plea of ill-health, she escaped quietly to the country, and there set to work to learn the rudiments of farming, and how to manage a house without the aid of servants.

Thus, while busy with preparations for the future,

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eight of the tedious months of waiting slipped away. At last the glorious end was now in sight. At Christmas she went to Yorkshire to visit relatives, Sir Clifford and Lady Constable, at Burton Constable. There she decided to await Richard's coming; as one of a large party, she hoped the time might pass quickly for her. But she had not long to wait. Indeed, she had been in the house but a few hours when she happened to pick up a copy of "The Times," which had just arrived.

She glanced at the paper casually, and there, to her astonishment, saw a paragraph which announced that Captain Burton had returned unexpectedly that morning from America!

VII

"I was unable," she wrote, "except by great resolution, to continue what I was doing. I soon retired to my room, and sat up all night, packing and conjecturing how I should get away—all my numerous plans tending to a 'bolt' next morning—should I get an affectionate letter from Richard." And she did; she received two letters, and, within twelve hours, contrived also to receive a wire summoning her to London on important business.

There Burton met her. His manner was severe and firm. "Now you must make up your mind," he said, ". . . if you choose me, we marry and I stay; if not, I go back to India, or on other explorations, and I return no more. Is your answer ready?"

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"Quite," replied Isabel. "I marry you this day three weeks, let who will say nay."

Of this date Burton did not approve. Wednesday the 23rd and Friday the 13th were his unlucky days. The wedding, he said, must take place on Tuesday, January 22.

Isabel then told her parents this decision. "I consent with all my heart," the father said, "if your mother consents." With this her brothers and sisters agreed, but Mrs. Arundell was obdurate; nothing would move her.

So Isabel, acting on the advice of her father, consulted Cardinal Wiseman, telling him the whole story of her love for Burton. The Cardinal listened sympathetically, and when she had finished bade her to leave the matter in his hands.

Then he sent for Burton, and questioned him closely.

"Practise her religion, indeed!" said the latter, undaunted by the cross-examination. "I should rather think she *shall*. A man without a religion may be excused, but a woman without a religion is not the woman for me."

And this answer amused the Cardinal, and convinced him. He admired the man for his honesty, and straight-way offered himself to perform the marriage ceremony, undertaking to procure from Rome a special dispensation.

On the following day the Arundell family met to devise a course of action. Obviously it was imperative

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that, at the time, Mrs. Arundell should hear nothing of the wedding. It seemed best, then, that Isabel should be married from the house of friends—Dr. and Miss Bird volunteered their services—and that friends only should attend the ceremony. This was the final arrangement.

And forthwith Isabel set to work ostensibly to make preparations to pay a visit in the country; and her mother helped her, suspecting nothing.

Then the great day came.

"At nine o'clock on Tuesday, January 22, 1861," she wrote, "my cab was at the door, with my box on it. I had to go and wish my father and mother good-bye before leaving. I went downstairs with a beating heart after I had knelt in my own room, and said a fervent prayer that they would bless me, if they did I would take it as a sign. I was so nervous I could scarcely stand. When I went in mother kissed me, and said, 'Good-bye, child. God bless you!' I went to my father's bedside, and knelt down, and said good-bye. 'God bless you, my darling!' he said, and put his hand out of the bed and laid it on my head. I was too much overcome to speak, and one or two tears ran down my cheeks, and I remember as I passed down I kissed the door outside.

"I then ran downstairs and quickly got into the cab, and drove to the house (the Birds' house) . . . where I changed my clothes—not wedding-clothes (clothes which most brides to-day would probably laugh at)—

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a fawn-coloured dress, a black lace cloak, and a white bonnet—and . . . drove to the Bavarian Catholic Church, Warwick Street. When assembled we were altogether a party of eight. The registrar was there for legality, as is customary. Richard was waiting on the doorstep for me, and as we went in he took holy water and made a very large sign of the cross. As the 10-30 Mass was about to begin we were called into the sacristy, and we found that the Cardinal, in the night, had been seized with an acute attack of illness . . . and had deputed Dr. Hearne, his vicar-general, to be his proxy.

“After the ceremony was over . . . we went back to the house of our friends, Dr. Bird and his sister Alice . . . where we had our wedding-breakfast. . . . We then went to Richard’s bachelor lodgings, where he had a bedroom, dressing-room, and sitting-room ; and we had a very few pounds to bless ourselves with, but we were as happy as it is given to any mortals out of heaven to be.”

VIII

Their joint income was only £350 a year, but they were utterly contented, and, owing to Isabel’s tact and magnetic influence, immediately were able to assume a prominent position in society. Isabel was determined to prevent Burton’s brilliance from rusting in obscurity; and she succeeded admirably. Indeed, the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, gave a dinner-party speci-

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ally to honour the newly wedded couple. And even Queen Victoria, contrary to all precedents, allowed the bride of a runaway marriage to be presented to her at Court.

Three months after her marriage, moreover, Isabel secured for her husband official recognition. True, it was only a humble appointment which the Government offered him, the consulate of Fernando Po, a deadly spot on the West Coast of Africa, barely fit for human habitation ; no white woman certainly could live in such a place.

None the less, Burton accepted the offer, and went out alone. Isabel allowed him no alternative. It was her wish, she declared, to be a help to him, not a handicap ; and to scale the official ladder, she maintained, a man must begin on the lowest rung. Only to herself did she admit the bitterness of her disappointment. "One's husband in a place where I am not allowed to go, and I living with my mother like a girl," she wrote. "I am neither maid nor wife nor widow." It was intolerable. Still, one thing was very clear. Another position must be found for Burton. And she found it. Indeed, she gave Lord Russell, the Foreign Secretary, no peace until at last, in desperation, he offered to Burton a consulate in Brazil.

There Isabel could join him. There she did join him. And thenceforth she and her husband never were long apart. Wherever he went, she went also, working with him, working for him ; whilst, in the end, she did

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for him what he could never have done for himself ; she forced England to appreciate his greatness.

"You will have seen from the papers," she wrote to a friend in 1886, "... that the Conservatives on going out made Dick Sir Richard Burton, K.C.M.G. ... The Queen's recognition of Dick's forty-four years of service was sweetly done at last, sent for our silver-wedding, and she told a friend of mine that she was pleased to confer something which would include both husband and wife."

But, alas ! this recognition had come too late. Ten years before, such an honour might have lent encouragement to Burton's efforts ; might have helped him to batter down the wall of prejudice which hemmed him in. But now—never again would he be able to put to his lips the cup of adventure which he loved so well. He had finished his last draught. The arduous journeyings of the past had shattered at length even his iron constitution ; only his indomitable spirit still remained to testify his former might.

Life, it is true, lingered within him for four more years, but all the while the end loomed clear and large ; the man's strength even now was failing fast.

IX

Sunday, October 19, 1890—Lady Burton called it her last day of happiness. "I went out to Communion and Mass at eight o'clock," she wrote, "came back, and



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kissed my husband at his writing." He was engaged on the last page of "The Scented Garden"; on the morrow, he hoped to finish it, and then, he said, he would be free seriously to make arrangements for the voyage to Greece and Constantinople which he and Isabel long had contemplated.

During the day he talked much about that journey and appeared to be in the very best of spirits. At half-past nine in the evening he got up from his chair and retired to his bedroom, just as usual. His wife followed him. But, while she was saying the night prayers to him—so she declared afterwards—"a dog began that dreadful howling which the superstitious say denotes a death." So greatly did it disturb her that she got up and asked the porter to go out and see what was the matter with the dog. After this she finished the prayers. Then Burton asked her for a novel; she gave him Robert Buchanan's "Martyrdom of Madeleine"; kissed him and got into bed.

For a long while her husband lay reading quietly, but at midnight he grew uneasy, complaining of a pain in his foot. At four o'clock the pain was worse, so much worse that Isabel sent for the doctor. The latter, however, could find nothing wrong; heart and pulse both were in perfect order. So he did not wait.

At half-past four, Isabel sent for him again; her husband, she said, had had a sudden seizure. The doctor returned immediately, this time to find Burton lying in his wife's arms, helpless. A minute later he became

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unconscious. After that he never moved again ; neither skill nor all the ingenuity of science could awaken him. Burton was sinking into the profound, last sleep of death.

“By the clasp of the hand”—his wife wrote afterwards—“and a little trickle of blood running under the finger, I judged that there was a little life until seven, and then I knew that . . . I was alone and desolate for ever.”

But still she had his memory, still she had her love ; a love stronger than the strongest bonds of Death ; a love which no power in heaven or earth could weaken. She was not alone then, nor desolate.

And, until Death claimed her too, the flame of devotion burned in her heart as purely and as steadfastly as ever heretofore ; even more purely, more steadfastly. While Burton lived she had devoted her life to his ; now that he was dead, to his memory she consecrated all her services.

Men had misunderstood Sir Richard Burton, misjudged him cruelly ; and his name, tarnished most hideously, was anathema in many homes. To remove these stains, then, from the fair whiteness of his memory, and to reveal him to the world as the true and honourable man whom she had known and loved—this was his widow's sole ambition.

More stains most certainly must not be added. So then it was that she destroyed the pages of “The Scented Garden,” his last unpublished manuscript.

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Many, she felt, might read the book, but only a very few would understand it or appreciate. Therefore she burned it deliberately, page by page, and robbed the world of a masterpiece of literature. A publisher offered her £6,000 for the manuscript before he had even seen it. • And £6,000 would have meant much to Lady Burton ; her husband had left her very scantily provided for. But she refused the offer.

In her eyes there was a something more precious than wealth or fame or all the rich prizes of the world, and that something was her husband's memory—his memory and his good name.

Dante and Beatrice



DANTE

From a photo graph after the original picture by Giotto

VIII

DANTE AND BEATRICE

I

NATURE has a supreme sense of the fitness of things. Perhaps that is why she made Dante a citizen of Florence—the city of beauty, the poet of beauty, unquestionably they belong to one another. Indeed, as one wanders through that paradise set in the world's most lovely garden, fanciful imaginings run riot; at every corner one sees some sweet association, in every stone some tender sentiment.

And yet the Florence in which the poet had his being was very different from the superbly splendid Florence of to-day. When Dante was born, not yet had the cathedral even been begun; the Campanile was still a treasure which the future held in store. One is apt to forget this, and, maybe, because it seems incredible that Dante should have lived so many as six centuries ago.

Still, Florence even then was Florence, and the blue of the Tuscan sky as incomparable as it is now. And Florence, of course, was Dante's home.

Even to-day, in fact, not far from the old church

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of San Martino, may be seen a narrow little doorway, which once was the entrance to the home of the Alighieri family, the house in which the *Divino Poeta* was born. Very little else remains of the original building. But in Dante's day it must have been a large and roomy mansion, for in it the entire family lived. As more accommodation was required, new stories had been added, new wings built on. It was customary for well-to-do Florentines thus to enlarge their houses.

The neighbours of the Alighieri had done the same—the Donati, a little further down the street, the Cerchi, and the Portinari. This corner of the city, therefore, soon became a little colony in itself, *imperium in imperio*; and the residents were neighbours in the word's true meaning.

Hence, when, in 1274, Folco Portinari decided to give a feast to his friends on May Day to celebrate the coming of the spring—a Tuscan spring; an occasion surely worthy of a feast!—it was only natural that he should invite his neighbours, the Alighieri.

And with them went little Dante, then a boy some nine years old. Nor was he by any means the only small boy present. Indeed, Boccaccio has told us, quite a crowd of children assembled at the feast, and, among them was “a daughter of the above-named Folco, . . . who was about eight years old, gay and beautiful in her childish fashion, and in her behaviour very gentle and agreeable; with habits and language more serious and modest than her age warranted; and besides this with

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features so delicate and so beautifully formed, and full, besides mere beauty, of so much candid loveliness that many thought her almost an angel."

But Dante—he thought her an angel quite, for the girl was none other than Beatrice, the Beatrice whose memory he has made immortal. And even on that, the afternoon when first she met his gaze, he had eyes for nobody in all the house—save only her; her loveliness, her beauty held him spellbound.

He could not bring himself to play with the other children; indeed, he forgot that they were present, and just stood gazing at Beatrice, worshipping and wondering. But speak to her—no; he could not, he dared not. Shyness forbade him. Yet some great emotion stirred his little nine-year heart most strangely. He could not understand its meaning.

And what was that emotion? Was it the passion men call love? Could it have been? Surely not; Dante was but nine years old, and Beatrice only eight, although, it is true, she was a dainty little maid, and must have looked truly charming in her dress "of a most noble colour, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age."¹

Then was it just simply a sublime, adoring admiration? Who can tell? Yet, whatever may have been its nature, from that emotion sprang the most wondrous love the

¹ This, and all subsequent quotations from Dante's writings are taken from Rossetti's translation of his works.

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world has ever known ; albeit—judged from the merely human standpoint—quite the most foolish. And surely the human standpoint is the right one from which to judge a lover. At any rate, love is essentially a personal and human force. Presumably, then, the measure of its strength lies more in accomplishment than in intentions.

But Dante's love for Beatrice—what did it accomplish? Nothing ; absolutely nothing—save to endow posterity with some incomparable writings, and a few rare, unattainable ideals.

Now, it may be, to Dante, love thus became a thing spiritualized and unreal, because it found him at a very early age, before yet his passions really had developed. Indeed, although in the sunny south, no doubt, boys become men, and maidens women, more quickly than in the frigid north, it is incredible that, at the age of nine, Dante should have felt any serious physical attraction to a little girl of eight. And yet, the poet himself declared that from the very moment when he first saw Beatrice, love governed his soul completely.

"This youngest daughter of the angels," he wrote, ". . . I . . . found her so noble and praiseworthy that certainly of her might have been said those words of the poet Homer, 'She seemed not to be the daughter of mortal man, but of God.'" Still, even he dared not to say much of his earliest feelings, for knowing them to be abnormal, he feared they would be ridiculed.

"Were I," he wrote, "to dwell overmuch on the

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passions of such early youth, my words might be counted something fabulous."

And so—his narrative continues—"after the lapse of so many days that nine years exactly were completed since the above-written appearance of this most gracious being . . . it happened that the same wonderful lady appeared to me, dressed all in pure white, between two gentle ladies older than she. And, passing through a street, she turned her eyes thither where I stood sorely abashed, and by her courtesy . . . she saluted me with so virtuous a bearing that I seemed then and there to behold the very limits of blessedness. The hour of her most sweet salutation was exactly the ninth of that day."

But could it have been that Dante had not seen Beatrice for nine long years? Why, the houses in which they lived almost adjoined one another. Surely, then, he must have seen her sometimes, perhaps in the church, perhaps in the market; or, it may be, surreptitiously have watched her from a window as she flitted along the street.

But no—he has assured us emphatically that he did not. First he met her when he was nine years old; and then again, exactly nine years later, on a May Day, too, and at the ninth hour of the day. And it would be sacrilege to regard this curious sequence of the figure nine merely as a poet's pretty, superstitious fancy.

One must be content to believe, then, that young

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Dante, favoured by fortune with a wealthy father, had been absent much from Florence during those years, pursuing learning in other cities, in Padua, in Bologna, studying philosophy, perhaps, and art and science, so that one day he might prove himself worthy of the creature of loveliness whose vision dwelt always in his mind.

Then he returned home. And there, as has been shown already, he met Beatrice again. And she smiled on him ! This was rapture indeed. What is more, she spoke to him ; “and because,” he declared, “it was the first time that any words from her had reached mine ears, I came into such sweetness that I parted thence as one intoxicated. And betaking me to the loneliness of mine own room, I fell to thinking of this most courteous lady, thinking of whom I was overtaken by a pleasant slumber wherein a marvellous vision was presented to me.

“There appeared to be in my room a mist of the colour of fire, within the which I discerned the figure of a lord of terrible aspect. . . . In his arms . . . a person was sleeping, covered only with a blood-coloured cloth. . . . I knew that it was the lady of the salutations who had deigned the day before to salute me. And he who held her held also in his hand a thing that was burning, and he said to me, *Vide cor tuum*. (Behold your heart.) But when he had remained with me a little while . . . he set himself to waken her that slept ; after the which he made her to eat that which flamed in his hand, and she ate as one fearing. Then . . . all his joy was

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turned into most bitter weeping, and as he wept he gathered the lady into his arms, and . . . went up with her towards Heaven."

What could be the meaning of this dream?

Its portent seemed to young Dante somehow to be grimly tragic. So he wrote a sonnet anonymously, addressing it "To every heart which the sweet pain doth move," in which he expounded his vision, and asked for an explanation to it.

The poet received several answers to his question, but none of them satisfied him. So a great uneasiness began to prey upon his mind, until at last he became ill in body also. Nor was it hard for any one to observe the nature of the malady. The man obviously was ill for the love of somebody. But of whom? His friends grew curious to know, and taxed him with many questions.

Dante, however, "looked into their faces, smiling, and spake no word in return."

II

Still, even in Italy in the thirteenth century, inquisitiveness was not thus easily to be appeased. Dante's friends, in fact, persisted in their questionings; but they persisted in vain—not one word would the poet say to enlighten them; curiosity made him only the more determined to guard his secret. No breath of scandal, he resolved, no word of idle gossip must ever be allowed to sully the fair name of Beatrice.

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And so, hoping thereby to throw dust in the eyes of his suspecting friends, he singled out a certain girl in Florence, and—presumably with her consent—ostentatiously addressed himself to her, paying her such marked attentions that, as he himself has said, “those who had hitherto watched and wondered at me now imagined they had found me out.”

The idea occurred to him in this manner. He happened to be in church one day. Beatrice was there also. And between her and himself, “in a direct line, there sat another lady of a pleasant favour; who”—Dante wrote—“looked round at me many times, marvelling at my continued gaze which seemed to have *her* for its object.”

Now, not only this lady, but many other people also, noted the direction of his gaze. And so it came about that, as he was leaving the church, Dante heard it whispered after him, “Look you to what a pass such a lady hath brought him.” For a moment he felt troubled; but then those who spoke happened also to mention the name of her who had been sitting between Beatrice and himself. Their words reassured the poet; for the present, at any rate, he felt confident that his secret remained unknown. So he resolved to continue making use of this lady to screen the truth. In this way he kept his “secret concealed till some years were gone over.”

And then, poor man, despite his subtle cunning, he had a bitter penalty to pay for all his shyness and his folly. . . .

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But, one may ask, what need was there for all this secrecy? Why did not Dante straightway tell Beatrice of his love, and beg her to marry him? Why not, indeed? He was not, as some writers have maintained, so greatly her inferior in rank as to make marriage with her impossible. He was not her inferior at all; and Boccaccio has declared that, had he but asked her for it, she would have given her hand gladly to him—and her heart.

Then what was the reason of his silence? Could it have been that Dante was more philosopher than poet, and knew that the Beatrice whom he loved was an ideal, an ideal of his own mind that never could be realized in life? Surely no; Dante, supreme among poets, never would have heeded a truth so mundane, so grossly cynical.

Then the real reason—and there could have been but one—was that the poet, oppressed by the weight of his own unworthiness, dared not to speak to Beatrice of his love, or lay before her virgin soul the story of his hopes and base desires. What right, he asked himself, had he to do so; what right even to wish that she, an angel of loveliness, should share with him his wretched life, and, for his sake, thrust upon her head the heavy crown of wifehood?

No—he decided—a thousand times, no; he must never ask so great a favour; nor ever would. Resolve was strong within him. Perhaps this was well.

Had he asked and been answered “Yes,” inevitably he must have found in store for him many a very sorry

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disappointment. Could any woman have fulfilled his lofty dream of feminine perfection—even the very gentle Beatrice? Surely not.

Adorable she may have been, but it was only to a poet's fancy that she seemed to be a daughter of the angels; at heart she, even she, I trow, was very woman, and, as such, would soon have shattered sweet illusions—at any rate, when she found herself wedded to a mystical young dreamer, with very spiritual ideals and very human inclinations, somewhat conceited^{er} withal, and egotistical.

Fortunately, Dante never asked; instead, he remained true to his unnatural determination that self must be sacrificed completely. So, he just stood afar, and gazed at Beatrice; gazed at her, and worshipped her and loved her. And, he hoped, this silent adoration might invoke, perchance, some happiness to fall upon her. That she should smile on him sometimes—that would be reward enough alone.

“Because mine eyes can never fill
Of looking at my lady's lovely face,
I will so fix my gaze,
That I may become blessed, beholding her.”

Yet, before long, even this privilege was withheld from him. The misfortune came about in this way. The good lady, who till now had acted as a mask to Dante's secret, suddenly had occasion to go from Florence and take up her abode elsewhere.

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This was a sorry day for the poet. Without somebody to aid him, how could he preserve his secret? And preserve it he must, at all costs. What then, was there for him to do? Find another compliant innamorata? There seemed to be no alternative. Clearly he could not hope successfully to entertain a bogus passion for a lady in a distant city. But first, he felt, he must at any rate give the impression of mourning her departure. Accordingly, he wrote a poem in which, piteously disconsolate, he lamented his sad loss. Love, he declared,

“ Vouchsafed to me a life so calm and sweet
That oft I heard folk question as I went
What such great gladness means—
They spoke of it behind me in the street.

“ But now that fearless bearing is all gone
Which with Love’s hoarded wealth was given me;
Till I am grown to be
So poor that I have ceased to think thereon.”

This done—and the words, he thought, would fully serve their purpose—Dante set out, with Love as his guide, to search through Florence for a lady who might act as substitute. And eventually, so he believed, Love showed him such a one. But either Dante must have failed to understand his guide’s intent, or, maybe, Love wilfully deceived him, as Love, no doubt, has deceived many another man before and since.

At any rate, the poet’s second choice proved less

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happy than the first. Nor really can this be deemed a matter for surprise, since, for some strange reason, Dante, it would seem, neglected to take the girl into his confidence. She, therefore, naturally believed his affection for her to be genuine, even as was hers for him, until she realized the truth.

Then the trouble began. Outraged and indignant, a great anger seized hold of her; nothing could pacify it, and as for her erstwhile lover's apologies and humble supplications—they served only to fan her wrath. Her love, in fact, turned in a moment all to hatred; and so persistently did she protest against the cruel treatment Dante had meted out to her that, at last, the voice of her complainings reached the ears of Beatrice.

And Beatrice, too, misunderstood the poet's motives, and was greatly angered. Till then she had thought well of him; indeed—oh, had he but known it!—she had admired him greatly. But now he had done that for which she never could forgive him; he had wronged a woman, wronged her most infamously. Determined, therefore, to vindicate the rights of her own sex, she denied him her salutation.

Then Dante, as apparently it was his wont to do on such occasions, retired "to a lonely place to bathe the ground with most bitter tears." And, he declared, "when, by this heat of weeping, I was somewhat relieved, I betook myself to my chamber where I could lament unheard." There a most strange happening befell him.

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Love came to him in a vision, and, after telling him what it was that had caused the gentle Beatrice to be wroth, bade him arise and send to her a poem to explain that he had offended only because he loved her, and had loved her now for many years. "And thus," Love told him, "she shall be made to know thy desire; knowing which, she will know likewise that they were deceived who spake of thee to her."

So Dante arose, and straightway sent Song forth on his mission, telling him first to seek out Love and go with him to the home of the dear lady, and there explain all to her. Then surely, he felt, she could not long withhold forgiveness from him.

It was with these words that he bade Song entreat:—

"Lady, his poor heart
Is so confirmed in faith
That all its thoughts are but of serving thee;
'Twas early thine, and could not swerve apart."

If still she wavered, he begged Song next

"Bid her ask Love, who knows if these things be,
And in the end, beg of her modestly,
To pardon so much boldness, saying, too,
'If thou declare his death to be thy due,
The thing shall come to pass as doth behove.'"

But Beatrice, for she had steeled her heart, ignored Song's prayer. No answer did she deign to give to Dante, only silence, the most cruel of all replies. In vain her lover waited. Then, poor man, troubled

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sorely, he sat down and communed solemnly with himself alone.

Was it right, he asked, that he should allow himself thus to be made miserable by a hopeless, unrequited love? Young blood still flowed through his veins, and the world was full of fair women. Surely among them he could find one to love?

Yet could he—with the vision of Beatrice ever in his mind? No, never; nothing could shake his loyalty; he would be always true to her. Her love, he no longer sought it, not even her salutation. The right to worship from afar, that was all he desired—that and the power to serve her should need arise. Then he would be amply compensated for his self-denial and for all his suffering. So he determined.

And by that determination, Dante certainly justified his claim to the distinction, commonly accorded to him, of being the most sincere of all known lovers. It was no mere accident of time and circumstance—this love he bore for Beatrice; no mere transient passion kindled in the fire of youth, but indeed, as he intended it to be, a true, sublime, unchangeable devotion which heeded not at all the needs of self, and made its victim impervious to all the seductive sweetnesses of life.

Still, despite its beauty, how lamentably foolish it was too. It was not love as man knows love, this servile, self-abasing reverence. Nor surely was it love as ever woman wished for it. But Dante could not bring himself to recognize this truth, or think of Beatrice

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merely as one endowed with vulgar, human passions, like himself.

So he rejoiced in his martyrdom; and with such a love as he had burning in his heart, felt that, for his sufferings, no real ill ever could befall him. Nor—so he hoped—could his devotion bring aught but good to his dear lady.

III

Now it happened that, not long after he had come to this great decision, Dante again found himself in the presence of Beatrice. They met, it would seem, at a wedding. And so acute and manifest was the poet's discomfiture and confusion that commentators have agreed, almost unanimously, that the wedding could have been none other than that of the fair Beatrice herself.

It is impossible, of course, absolutely to verify this statement, for, in the *Vita Nuova*, Dante makes no reference to the date.

He merely says a friend took him to a house, at which many ladies "were assembled around a gentlewoman who was given in marriage on that day," and that there, at his friend's request, he decided to stay and "do honour to those ladies." "But," he wrote, "as soon as I had thus resolved, I began to feel a faintness and a throbbing at my left side, which soon took possession of my whole body. Whereupon I remember that I covertly leaned my back unto a painting that ran round the

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walls of that house; and being fearful lest my trembling should be discerned of them, I lifted mine eyes to look on those ladies, and then first perceived among them the excellent Beatrice."

On the other hand, however, nowhere else in the *Vita Nuova* does Dante allude either to Beatrice's wedding or to Beatrice being present at a wedding. 'Hence, seeing it is known that, in the year 1287, she married a certain Simone de' Bardi, a member of one of the great Florentine banking-houses, 'supposition strongly favours the belief that it was at her own wedding that Dante now met her; as, of course, also does the poet's confessed and manifest distress on this occasion.

Nor could he disguise his feelings, try as he would, his senses, he declared, being "overpowered by the great lordship that Love obtained, finding himself so near unto that most gracious being." In consequence, then, he made himself an object of ridicule among his fellow-guests, who drew him among them and, mocking, bade him tell them what it was that ailed him. Even Beatrice joined with them, laughing at his sorry mien.

Her scorn was the bitterest pain of all; it stung the poet to the very heart. None the less, he bore it with fortitude, and readily forgave Beatrice her lack of sympathy, for, so he told himself, after he had returned to his room and finished his usual bout of weeping, "If this lady but knew of my condition, I do not think that she would thus mock at me; nay, I am sure that she must needs feel some pity."

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But by this time Beatrice surely must have known the truth. Indeed, who but a Dante could possibly have deceived himself into believing otherwise?—especially seeing that, owing to his behaviour at the wedding, as he was well aware, many of the other ladies present had divined his secret. In fact, a few days later, certain of them stopped him in the street, and one, addressing him by name, asked boldly: “To what end lovest thou this lady, seeing that thou canst not support her presence?”

“Ladies,” the poet replied, “the end and aim of my Love was but the salutation of that lady of whom I conceive that ye are speaking.”

Then—so he wrote afterwards—“these ladies began to talk closely together; and as I have seen snow fall among the rain, so was their talk mingled with sighs.”

After this, she, who had spoken before, said: “We pray thee that thou wilt tell us wherein abideth this thy beatitude.”

“In those words that do praise my lady,” Dante answered.

Then the ladies left him; and the poet, as he went his way alone, pleased with his happy repartee, resolved within himself that from that time forward the sole theme of all his writings should be “the praise of this most gracious being.”

His sweet illusions, then, not yet had faded; in spite of everything, he still saw Beatrice only as a something spiritual, a daughter of the angels of whose love, even of whose esteem, he felt most utterly unworthy. To

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serve her, to be able to serve her—for this alone he dared to hope; even to be able to suffer for her. And he longed with an ineffable longing for the opportunity, until at last it came about that a chance was given him.

In short, Folco Portinari died. Now Beatrice had been devoted to her father, nor would it seem without reason, for Dante has described him as a man “of exceeding goodness”;¹ and her grief at having lost him was piteous to behold. But every pang of pain she felt, hurt Dante a thousandfold more, until at length his “body became afflicted with a painful infirmity, whereby” —he declared—“I suffered bitter anguish for many days which at last brought me into such weakness that I could no longer move. And I remember that on the ninth day, being overcome with intolerable pain, a thought came into my mind concerning my lady . . . and, weeping, I said within myself: ‘Certainly it must some time come to pass that the very gentle Beatrice will die.’”

Then, bewildered by the awfulness of his thoughts, he closed his eyes, and, behold, saw yet another vision. “The sun went out, so that the stars showed themselves, and they were of such a colour that I knew they must be weeping; and it seemed to me that the birds fell dead out of the sky, and there were great earthquakes. With that, while I wondered in my trance . . . I conceived that a certain friend came unto me, and said,

¹ During his lifetime, Folco Portinari held numerous high offices in Florence; and proved himself a true public benefactor by founding the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova.

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‘Hast thou not heard? She that was thine excellent lady hath been taken out of life!’

“Then I began to weep very piteously; and not only in mine imagination, but with mine eyes, which were wet with tears. And . . . my heart, that was so full of love, said unto me, ‘It is true that our lady lieth dead’; and it seemed to me that I went to look upon the body wherein that blessed and most noble spirit had had its abiding-place. . . . And therewithal I came, with such humility by the sight of her that I cried out upon death, saying, ‘Now come unto me, and be not bitter against me any longer; surely, there where thou hast been, thou hast learned gentleness. Wherefore come now unto me who do greatly desire thee; seest thou not that I wear thy colour already?’”

Then Dante awoke. Some watcher-on, alarmed by the sleeper’s groans and agonies, had aroused him. And he was glad to look upon the day again, glad to know that his vision had been but a dream.

Yet, perchance, it might be more than this. Was it? Was it? Somehow he could not dispel the vision from his mind, and it weighed on him like a hideous portent, although at this time there were for him many other considerations to distract his woe.

Dante, be it remembered, was by no means merely the love-sick swain such as in the *Vita Nuova* he describes himself. On the contrary, he was a citizen of Florence and, in very truth, a man. Indeed, even now, while shedding bitter tears of sympathy with the grief of his dear lady,

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he was engaged actively in the affairs of the city, participating in that bloody war between the Guelfs of Florence and the Ghibellines of Arezzo, which culminated at last in a crushing and absolute defeat of the Aretines at the great fight at Campaldino on June 11th, 1289.

Dante himself took part in the battle ; and, according to Leonardo Bruni, "fought vigorously on horseback in the front rank, where he was exposed to very real danger ; for the first shock of battle was between the opposing horse."

Of these and many other stirring happenings the poet makes no mention in his story of his love for Beatrice ; the *Vita Nuova* gives the impression that an absolute happiness and content reigned in Florence, and, moreover, all because Beatrice now was forgetting the intensity of her grief, and had come "at last into such favour with all men, that when she passed anywhere folk ran to behold her ; which thing"—Dante declared—"was a deep joy to me."

Still, there remained with him the horrid memory of his dream ; and, despite the pleasure which Beatrice's recovery of happiness had given him, nothing could dispel it from his mind.

"Certainly it must some time come to pass that the very gentle Beatrice will die." The words echoed and still re-echoed through his heart, until at length—nor was it many weeks later—that time did come. In fact, but a year after the battle of Campaldino, in June,

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1290, it happened to Dante that, as he himself expressed it, "the Lord God of Justice called my most gracious lady unto himself," and thereby left "the whole city widowed and despoiled of all its dignity."

IV

For a while after the death of Beatrice, the poet's grief remained quite inconsolable. Yet on the subject of his irreparable loss he said but little. Words failed him; even he could not adequately express his anguish. As Mrs. Oliphant has written, "the sudden tottering of reason which is natural to man dazed and bewildered by such a calamity" seemed to come over him, and, in his writings, he fell "to babbling, yet with all the intensity of his ardent soul, about the number nine¹ which regulated that lovely concluded life."

Then, exactly one year after this great sorrow had befallen him, he happened to raise his eyes one day, and perceived a young and very beautiful lady gazing at him from a window with a gaze full of pity, "so that," he said, "the very sum of pity appeared gathered together in her."

Nor, would it seem, was this the only occasion on which he thus raised his eyes, for, he wrote later,

¹ Dante and Beatrice met for the first time in their ninth year; nine years later they spoke together. And now it came about that, on the ninth day of a month in the ninetieth year of a century, Beatrice died—a series of coincidences which surely is not sufficiently striking to justify the emphasis Dante lays upon it.

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"whenever I was seen of this lady she became pale and of a piteous countenance, as though it had been with love; whereby she remembered me many times by our most noble lady, who was wont to be of a like paleness. . . ."

"At length, by the constant sight of this lady," he added, "mine eyes began to be gladdened overmuch with her company; through which thing many times I had much unrest, and rebuked myself as a base person; also, many times I cursed the unsteadfastness of mine eyes."

Now exactly what may have been Dante's relationship to this fair enchantress, it is impossible to say. Still, it is very clear that, soon after the death of Beatrice, he became involved in a love affair which was very much less spiritual than real. He himself referred to this backsliding in his *Purgatorio* when Beatrice met him and rebuked him firmly for his wantonness. And there are rumours of other and similar entanglements. One may safely assume, then, that despite the exalted passion of his youth, the divine poet really was a very susceptible and human genius.

So, then, it came about that, before long, he decided to take unto himself a wife. This, according to Boccaccio, he did solely in obedience to the advice of relatives, hoping thereby to find consolation for the loss of Beatrice—and a very futile hope Boccaccio thought it.

But he, of course, was a confirmed old cynic, who, on principle, regarded marrying as arrant

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folly. Philosophers, he once declared, should leave matrimony "to rich fools, to noblemen, and to labourers."

But in Dante's case, one must confess, his cynicism was justified. The poet's marriage, in short, was not an unalloyed success; though, from a strictly worldly point of view, most wise and most politic, for the lady whom he chose—Gemma, daughter of Manetto and Maria Donati—happened to belong to one of the most powerful and influential families in all Florence.

Dante was married to her, it would seem, in the little church of Santa Maria, a church full with memories of Beatrice, in the year 1293, just when he was beginning to write that immortal epic of which Beatrice is the central and inspiring figure. The bride, therefore, was forced to take up her abode with a husband whose thoughts and interests were absorbed entirely in the charms and virtues of a former love.

This could hardly have been gratifying. Still, despite time-hallowed credence, there is no sufficient evidence to show that she proved herself a bad and shrewish wife. Indeed, the calumnies which have been heaped mercilessly on her head are based mainly on the words of a man who frankly was prejudiced against her.

Prior to the poet's marriage, Boccaccio wrote, Dante "had been used to spend his time over his precious studies whenever he was inclined, and would converse with kings and princes, dispute with philosophers, and frequent the company of poets, the burden of whose

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griefs he would share, and thus solace his own. Now, whenever it pleased his new mistress, he must at her bidding quit this distinguished company, and bear with the talk of women, and to avoid a worse vexation must not only assent to their opinions, but against his inclination must even approve them. He who, whenever the presence of the vulgar herd had annoyed him, had been accustomed to retire to some solitary spot, . . . must abandon all . . . sweet contemplation and . . . must account to his mistress for every emotion, nay, even for every little sigh.

“Oh! what unspeakable weariness to have to live day by day, and at last to grow old and die, in the company of such a suspicious being!”

Much of this, no doubt, was true. But it would be unfair to lay all the blame at Gemma's door. She was merely an ordinary woman; her husband happened to be a genius. It was incompatibility of temperament, then, that made their union an unhappy one; and for this Dante was as much to blame as she—probably more.

Gemma, in fact, seems to have done her utmost to fulfil worthily her duties to him as a wife. At any rate, she bore him seven children in seven years—seven children, one of whom he had the audacity to name Beatrice!—and in addition afforded him the full benefit of all her influence, so that, as her husband, he rose rapidly in civic fame, until at last, in 1300, he was chosen one of the six Priors of Florence—the highest honour that could be conferred upon him.

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Soon after he had acquired his new dignity, however, Dante became unavoidably involved in the fierce strife which at that time convulsed Florence, between the two Gueft families—the Donati and the Cerchi. What is more, he had the misfortune to find himfelf on the lofing fide, and in confequence, at the termination of hoftilities, was exiled from the city, with the reafuring promife that, fhould he dare ever again to fhew his face inside the walls, he would be “burned with fire fo that he die.”

So Dante departed. But he went alone; Gemma remained behind in Florence; nor did ſhe and her husband ever meet again. And this, of courſe, may have been becauſe—as Boccaccio would have us believe—he had already ſeen too much of her. But ſurely it is more likely that Gemma had ſeen too much of him, this husband ſtill paſſionately in love with the memory of one long dead.

For many years after he had been hounded from Florence, the luckleſs politician poet wandered round Italy trying to arouſe popes and princes to take intereſt in his afflictions, and help him to regain his rights.

But in 1317, having deſpaired at laſt of reſtating himſelf in the favour of his countrymen, he retired to Ravenna; and there, with his two ſons, Pietro and Jacopo, and his daughter Beatrice, he lived until, on September 14th, 1321, in his fifty-feventh year, he paſſed away.

And then “there can be no doubt but that,” as

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Boccaccio has said, "he was received into the arms of the most noble Beatrice, with whom, in the presence of Him who is the supreme God, having laid aside the miseries of this present life, he now joyfully lives in that felicity which awaits no end."

Léon Gambetta and Léonie Léon




GAMBETTA

From an engraving by Holt, after a photograph

IX

LÉON GAMBETTA AND LÉONIE LÉON

I

Y my opinions, by my political actions, I wish to secure the supremacy of the people . . . to restore and establish . . . the doctrine, rights, vindications, and even the inconsistencies of a thorough democracy. . . .”

Gambetta was speaking. The Legislative Assembly was crowded ; not a vacant seat could be seen, for the brilliant young democrat, who suddenly had risen from nothing and proved himself the greatest orator of the day, was a force to be reckoned with in France—even in 1869, when the star of Napoleon III seemed still to be in the ascendant.

Not a sound disturbed the impressive stillness of the House—save the voice of the speaker. The President of the Chamber, the Deputies, the ladies in the galleries all sat motionless, enthralled by the young orator’s eloquent sincerity.

At last, with a characteristic wave of his arms, Gambetta finished speaking. For a moment there was silence. Then suddenly—for the spell had now been broken—a whispering and restless impatience filled the House ; women chattered, men rose from

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their seats, some to depart, others to talk with friends.

One figure only remained still passive, still under the influence of the speaker, the figure of a woman, tall, slim, and beautiful.

As he crossed the floor of the House, Gambetta glanced at her. This mysterious, black-gloved woman puzzled him. For months past she had always been there when he was speaking, always in the same seat, always gazing at him. And her eyes seemed to penetrate his very soul; he could feel their influence, but their message—it was an enigma to him. Who was she? Why was she there? Why did she stare thus at him, her face expressive neither of approval nor of disapproval? He could find no answer to the questions. In vain he sought for it.

But Gambetta was ignorant of the ways of women. His had been a life of work, a life of struggle; he had had no time for social intercourse. His friends numbered only a few wild Bohemians whom, during leisure hours, he bewitched with Republican doctrines at the Café Procope. To the world he appeared a mystery; his fellow-men saw only his strength, his daring, his tenacity of purpose, not his frailties. In this, perhaps, lay one of the secrets of the man's success.

And that success indeed had been astonishing. At the age of thirty-four, although only of humble Italian parentage, Gambetta found himself one of the most prominent figures in the arena of French politics, the

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man of the moment, hailed by prophets as the statesman of the future. Yet determination had been his only asset—that and a wonderful sincerity which his gift of oratory made supremely real, and which, in itself, assured his triumph. If ever there has been a true patriot, Gambetta was that man. He served France well, moreover, despite his mistakes; and they were many.

But if he did much for France, the lady of the black gloves, Léonie Léon, did more, for she it was who made Gambetta; she it was who inspired his great achievements, restrained his restless spirit and guided him along that narrow, tortuous path which winds its way through countless dangers to success.

Léonie became his mentor, his friend, his *confidante*; and she loved him. What is more, she understood him, and was able more often than he knew to save him from himself, to reason with him in the hour of triumph, to encourage him when in despair.

And Gambetta knew that he owed her much. "Come!" he wrote, not long before his death, "our business prospers, and Minerva can be proud. Athens will erect altars to her if Athens, by recovering her former splendour, can recover her virtue—gratitude."

But Athens erected no altars. And for this Léonie was glad. She had wished to efface herself entirely; for Gambetta she lived, for his honour, his glory, his fame; she thought of nothing else. He became her idol at the very moment when first she saw him; and thenceforth she adored him with an utter disregard of

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her own self, as the brain and mouthpiece of all her noblest hopes.

Gambetta, of course, was unaware of this; he knew not why she came there to hear him speak. He only knew that she was beautiful, distractingly beautiful; that her features were perfect, and her skin like ivory, upon which her hair rippled in great dark waves. And her eyes—they maddened him. What did they say to him? Why did they look, and, so he sometimes thought, look longingly, at him—a wild, impetuous son of the people? What charm could he or his ambitions hold for such a woman? Curiosity grew into a very torture.

And so at last—he selected this day perhaps because once she seemed to smile at him—as he stepped down from the rostrum at the conclusion of his speech, he moved towards a table, scribbled a note, and asked an official to give it to the lady with the black gloves. Then, trembling, he awaited the result.

The woman took the note and opened it. Gambetta watched her every movement. Slowly she read it, very slowly, very deliberately, but then tore it into tiny pieces, and, without glancing once towards the writer, left the House. On the next day she did not return, nor on the next, nor yet the next. He must have offended her, Gambetta thought; and, in consequence, he felt sad and disappointed, for he had begun now to realize that in some mysterious way this unknown woman was necessary to him, that in her he would find

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a someone to understand him—a friend. And he needed a friend.

But now, so it seemed, he had lost her. Nor, for the present, could he look for her. At that time sterner duties called him; he dared not undertake a quest of love. France, in short, required his services; France standing on the brink of a disastrous war.

Vigorously Gambetta had opposed that war. But the country had refused to listen to him. Still trusting in the Emperor's might, and heedless of saner counsels, she chose instead to march blindly and with foolish arrogance to ruin.

Although hostilities with Prussia began only in the middle of July, 1870, within two short months Napoleon III and one army had surrendered at Sedan; another army, under Bazaine, was locked up in Metz; the enemy were marching straight on Paris.

Forthwith Gambetta threw prejudice to the winds. If France could not emerge victorious from the war, at least she must save her honour. Paris, he resolved, at any rate must never fall into the hands of foreigners.

He became at once the very heart and soul of the defence. And then, as the German lines closed round the city, seeing that nothing more could be done within, he escaped in a balloon, and set to work to raise the South of France to arms. Perhaps he would have succeeded in relieving Paris, had only Bazaine co-operated with him from Metz—perhaps. It is futile to conjecture. Bazaine would not co-operate; he refused

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to act with the man who had proclaimed a Republic and, he said, betrayed the Emperor.

So Paris fell.

And it was then, in the Chamber of the Provisional Government, the *Assemblée Nationale*, that Gambetta, still protesting against the surrender of Alsace and Lorraine, again saw the lady of the black gloves, Léonie Léon. She was sitting there as beautiful, as mysterious as ever, listening intently to every word. Gambetta watched her, and her presence seemed to inspire and stimulate his eloquence. And now that he had found her again, he was determined that she should not escape—at any rate, until he had penetrated the mystery which surrounded her.

At the conclusion of his speech, therefore, he sent her another message, short, but full of meaning. "At last I see you once more," he wrote. "Is it really you?" That was all. And the woman smiled as she read it. But still she heeded not the prayer; indeed, without giving even a sign, she rose, as she had done before, and left the hall.

But this time she did not destroy the letter. Instead, she slipped it in her dress. Gambetta noticed the action. It filled him with hope.

Many months, however, were destined to elapse before again he saw her, momentous, awful months, while anarchy swept through the land. In Paris the Commune raged, and atrocities were perpetrated compared with which the horrors of the siege had been as

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nothing. Confusion prevailed everywhere. It was a hideous sight—France murdering herself, whilst from Versailles the forces of law and order strove bravely to save her from her folly.

The “No Surrender” party, headed by Gambetta, still favoured a continuation of the war. The other party, headed by M. Thiers, advocated peace at any price. M. Thiers, of course, was right, but his majority was small. So strong were his opponents, in fact, that, for a while nothing, it seemed, could prevent a civil war—save only Gambetta. Like a true patriot, therefore, he surrendered his principles, resigned his office, and retired into seclusion, leaving his rival master of the situation.

Nor did he return to Paris till peace had been established. And then he had his reward, for in Paris he met Léonie again.

II

It happened in this wise :—

A friend of Gambetta, a man whom he had known since childhood, met with an accident in the hunting field one day. Fortunately his hurt was not serious. Gambetta, none the less—for he was a kindly, sympathetic man—so soon as he had heard of the mishap, set out to make inquiries.

On arriving at the house, the servant told him that his friend’s mother was at home ; then asked, Would M. Gambetta come in ?

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He entered; but was sorry that he had, for a reception seemed to be in progress, and the *salon* was full of visitors—a state of affairs by no means to his liking. Still, it was too late now to escape. So he addressed a few words to his hostess, and then looked despairingly around the room in the vain hope of finding a familiar face.

To his surprise he found one. SHE was there, the lady of the black gloves; and she had recognized him; she was looking towards him now—smiling. For a moment their eyes met, a tense moment, profound in meaning. Then, like one in a dream, Gambetta moved across the room towards her. She waited for him. And for a while they stood talking nervously together of those commonplace and foolish things which men and women do discuss at times like this and in such places. At length, unable longer to restrain himself, Gambetta said: “I want to talk to you where we can be alone. May I walk home with you?”

He gave her no opportunity to refuse. So they left the house, and walked together slowly down the street.

Gambetta was the first to break the silence. “Why,” he demanded, “did you ignore my letters?”

The woman ventured no reply.

“Did you think I was playing with you? Don’t you know that I love you, that I’ve loved you now for years?”

But Léonie restrained him. “Stop,” she said, “you

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know not what you say. I am not worthy of you, not worthy of your destiny. You must not speak to me of love." And she held out her hand as though to say good-bye.

Gambetta seized it, and held it firmly. "You cannot leave me thus," he begged. "You shall, you must listen to me!"

The woman hesitated. "Be it as you will," she said. "I will explain one day"—and she laughed; it was a hard and bitter laugh—"I will tell you all my sorry story. Then you will understand."

"But when?" Gambetta spoke eagerly. "May I come and call on you?"

"No, no! Please do not dare do that. You mustn't come to my house, I beg you. Let us meet early in the morning when nobody will see us—to-morrow!"

So it was arranged; in the park of Versailles near the Petit Trianon at eight o'clock.

Gambetta arrived first at the place of meeting, long before the appointed hour, and, for eternity it seemed to him, tramped the long avenues with ill-disguised impatience. It was a glorious morning, still with the stillness of early autumn. But he was heedless of its beauties, deaf to the songs of the birds, for he was waiting, waiting for his love, and his love came not.

A clock struck eight. Still he was alone. Five minutes passed, six, seven, eight, but then—at last he saw her, hastening towards him. And a supreme happiness filled his heart, for he knew then that he

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loved that woman as he had never before loved any other woman, nor ever could again.

Nor did her confession surprise him. He had half expected it, for that sympathy and understanding which spring from a great sorrow were written clearly on her face. Patiently, then, he listened while she stumbled through her miserable story.

Her father, Léonie told him, had died when she was still a child. He had been a colonel in the army; a great friend of the Duc d'Orleans, and a brave man, but, somehow, base and ugly rumours had begun to circulate concerning him; and he, in despair, unable to endure a slur upon his honour, had committed suicide, leaving her without a penny, a friendless, helpless orphan. She had tried to earn her living as a governess, but it had been a cruel struggle. She was too young, too simple, too inexperienced, too trusting. And then. . . . Tears strangled the woman's words; she buried her face in her hands and wept.

But she had no need to say more. Gambetta now understood everything. The world is a hard place for lonely girls to live in; Imperial France had been very hard, very cruel. And he knew it; a great sympathy strengthened his love, and he longed then and there to take her in his arms and comfort her.

But Léonie thrust him from her. "Now go!" she said. "You cannot marry me. You must have a wife of whom France will be proud. It is your duty. And I, too, have a duty—to renounce you. Don't make it harder!"

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But Gambetta refused to be renounced. He pleaded with the woman long, deaf to her protests, until at length she agreed to seal with him, at least, a bond of friendship, and to meet him thus every morning in the gardens of Versailles.

Now to the man these meetings were the sweetest joys in life. In Léonie he found more than a friend; he found a counsellor—a counsellor who, by her shrewd advice of moderation, did more than anybody else to help him drive from France the House of Bourbon, the House of Bonaparte, and finally establish the Republic. Léonie he trusted with all his secrets, seeking her advice on every question, and not only did she advise him well, she also humanized and made him reasonable. She found him a man; she made him a gentleman. And for this France should be grateful to her. The most priceless diamond is a crude stone until it has been polished.

But Gambetta, at any rate, valued her services; his letters breathe his gratitude. "You are divine," he told her in one of them, "and I am the happiest of mortals ever honoured by a goddess's favours. I owe everything to you, I ascribe everything to you. . . . It is useless for you to belittle yourself, to humiliate yourself; I shall always remind you of your real ability and power."

Now, that such a man and such a woman should have remained for long merely companions, would have been a happening in violation of every law of nature.

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Friendship was not a bond between them, but a barrier, and an artificial barrier, too. In vain, the woman struggled to support it; in vain the man tried to help her. That barrier could not stand; it could not resist the battery of love, for there is such a thing as the inevitable, and the inevitable is that which cannot be avoided.

So it came about that Léonie arrived one morning at the place of meeting first; and she was not before her time. What could have happened then? she wondered. Never before had she known Gambetta to be late. For a moment she felt troubled. But then she saw him coming, stepping jauntily along the path, a radiant smile upon his face. Her misgivings vanished instantly, and, as he approached nearer, she noticed that he carried in his hand a beautifully untidy bunch of flowers, still wet with dew.

"I have just picked these," he said; "the gardener knows me. Will you take them?" Then he was silent.

A lark burst into song. Still Gambetta remained silent. Léonie's fears returned. She glanced at the man, but his face told her nothing, save that he was nervous and distraught. So, taking the flowers, she buried her face in them, and waited for him to speak.

The silence seemed to last for hours. But then—"And will you take me also?" Gambetta asked. "Léonie, you must. I love you. I can wait no longer." He seized her roughly by the hand and pulled her to him. "Léonie, you must! You must!" he

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begged; and in her heart she longed to yield to him; longed for him to crush her passionately in his grasp. It was hard to resist—even for the sake of his career.

But resist she must. For France's sake as well as his own, Gambetta's fair name must be kept unsullied from association with such a one as hers. Still, to say "no" to him was nigh impossible; and Léonie knew that she must inevitably have struggled with herself in vain had not Gambetta, at length, all unwittingly given her a weapon, other than her altruism, with which to fight.

"Let us go to the magistrate," he implored, weary of arguing, "together—now. I do not fear the consequence. So come!" And he held out his hand to her.

But Léonie drew back. This she could not do. Intensely religious, the idea of a marriage not sanctified by a priest repelled her. The Church's blessing alone, she felt, could efface the tragedy of her past. But to Gambetta, of course, a civil marriage only was possible—to Gambetta, who at that very moment was striving to sever Church and State in France, not because he was an atheist, or even irreligious, but because he saw in clericalism and ultramontane influence the bitterest foes of liberty.

It was a difficult question to solve, then, this question of a marriage, for Léonie remained obdurate in her convictions. Nothing that Gambetta could say would

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move her. One concession only would she make. "If ever you are in trouble," she said, "or persecuted, then I will come to you—but not before."

This, however, did not satisfy her lover; passion was strong within him. So still he pleaded. "Then, Léonie," he begged, "be at least my wife in secret. Let us celebrate our betrothal now, according to the rites of bygone days. There was a time when such rites were as binding as are marriage ties. Here is a ring; once it belonged to my mother. Take it. It binds me to you for ever."

And Léonie took the ring. Gambetta had acted more cleverly than he knew in thus disguising his desire in superstition. Had it been a mere vulgar *liaison* which he demanded of her, she would, no doubt, still have withstood him. But this which he offered, this was very different. Her confessor—she remembered his words now—once had told her that the Church admitted of two kinds of betrothal, *sponsalia de presente* and *sponsalia de futuro*, and that the former, betrothal by present vows, was, under unavoidable circumstances, as binding as the sacrament of matrimony.

Now in this case—so she argued with herself—surely the circumstances were unavoidable. The world must be allowed never to guess the truth. And how else could the truth be hidden? How indeed? Besides, by yielding to Gambetta's wishes, she could hope, she thought, to save her poor tarnished reputation from being exposed again to the limelight of notoriety;

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perhaps, too, she might also prevent it from bringing harm upon her lover.

• Thus, convinced by her own arguments, she salved her conscience.

III

• Nor did the world guess the truth. For six years the lovers kept their secret, six long years, while Gambetta slowly climbed the ladder of success, raising France with him. Never, until the very end, did the breath of scandal touch his name, and this, although he was always in the public eye, perpetually spied upon, and watched by men whose business it was to watch him, men paid by his enemies to collect information which could be used against him.

But, of his relations with Léonie, even they guessed nothing. Gambetta was too cunning for them ; he did not meet Léonie by stealth or far from Paris. He was conspirator enough to know that if one hides one's secrets one only attracts attention to them. Instead, therefore, Léonie used to come openly, driven in his own carriage by his own coachman, to the house in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin in which he lived. And there, whenever he had no official function to attend, they would dine together, quite alone, and build visionary castles for themselves and France. Such daring disarmed suspicion.

Now to Gambetta the joy of evenings spent thus opened up an altogether new world of delights and

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possibilities ; how much these evenings meant to him even he could not realize, save when Léonie failed him. And this she did often ; she deemed it wiser not to come too frequently, for, as she knew, her lover's position was built on such very shallow soil that even the breath of gossip might make it totter. "It is the very nature of democracy to change," she told him, "to attempt and to attempt again. Ingratitude is its law, it sacrifices its dearest children with extraordinary calmness."

But of such fears Gambetta was heedless.

"My adored One," he wrote in March, 1873, ". . . I beg you to come back at once so that I may scold you at leisure ; come at least on Tuesday if not on Monday ; we will spend another of those divine evenings which seem to me, on the morrow, like the memory of some supernal happiness. Moreover, politics are progressing wonderfully well, and I shall be glad to chat with you about them. . . . But at least I must have the happiness of kneeling at your feet, for I cannot allow you to let such long intervals elapse between your visits. Come, I call you, I await you, I adore you."

Or again—this was written two years later ; Gambetta had arranged to spend a week-end in the country, with nothing to disturb him from Léonie ; but she, it would seem, at the eleventh hour had feared to go with him—"Little One," he asked, "why do you delay, and why do you let yourself be hindered at every step by

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trivialities? . . . We are our own masters; nature calls us; she has dressed herself in all her finery in our honour. So I shall expect you on Thursday; we will start on Friday and be back on Sunday night at the latest. Send me a definite reply, because I must send notice of our arrival."

Not because of Gambetta, then, was the secret preserved, but in spite of him. For his part, in fact, he would gladly have thrown discretion to the winds; he was proud of the woman whom he loved, inordinately proud, and he longed to show her to the world, so that it too might see and envy him his happiness.

To make Léonie mistress of his house, as well as mistress of his heart, became with him a positive obsession; it is the chord upon which, in his letters, he harped incessantly. In time, he thought, surely his entreaties would overcome resistance.

Once in 1879 he thought they had. "Yesterday was a memorable day," he wrote; "I began to believe I was shaking your determination. . . ."

So that was what he thought! At this time, too, when he was about to be offered the Presidency of the Republic! Léonie was greatly alarmed. "This is the end of our happiness," she replied; "I never will be; I never can be the wife of our country's ruler. You must feel that yourself. I am going away. I do not wish to be the last obstacle in your path when you reach the very summit."

And she went away. The next letter Gambetta

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received came from Italy. In it, Léonie begged him to forget her and to choose for himself a wife from some great family, who could further his interests ; she even suggested a girl, a relative of M. Thiers, the man whom she recognized as likely soon to become Gambetta's most dangerous opponent. "So, accomplish your great destiny," she said ; "I will shrink back into the shadow which luckily I have never left—was I not right ?"

"No, little one ; no," her lover replied, "this hand has waited ; it would rather wither than unite itself to another hand than thine ; be assured of this : either it will remain disconsolately empty, or it shall be thine. When will you accept it ? In future I shall end all my talks with that question whispered in your ear."

To this letter Léonie sent no reply. For several weeks she preserved her silence ; and during this time, as she had foreseen, Gambetta was offered the Presidency of the Republic. But he refused the honour.

And had his love for Léonie aught to do with his refusal ? One wonders. But the fact remains he declined the offer, and, for the present, was content with the Presidency of the Chamber. Yet even this was a position which Léonie could not bring herself to share with him, although in his new dignity he needed her as he had never needed her before. As President of the Chamber he was a big public man, with many social obligations. He needed a hostess greatly—such a hostess ! True, Léonie returned to

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Paris and did all she could to help him, making arrangements for him, ordering dinners, and arranging tables. But this alone was not enough. Gambetta missed that splendid happiness of jealousy which belongs to the man whose wife is the admiration of his friends.

"I thank thee a thousand times," he wrote to her on one occasion ; "your magnificent flowers astonished and charmed my guests, and all their praises went from my heart to yours, for in my heart I thanked you for them. You know what I need just now---your presence at these *fêtes* and the good which you could do. I shall always return to this subject, because at every moment of my life I remember it ; and I hope by strength of will to obtain what I want."

Gradually, then, gradually, slowly but very surely the woman gave way to him. But it was not until at last when his enemies had got the better of him that finally she yielded. Then she remembered the promise she had made long ago in the gardens of Versailles. "If ever you are in trouble," she had said, "or persecuted, then I will come to you." And she was true to that promise.

It happened in this way. In 1881, his opponents forced it upon Gambetta to form a Ministry, so that, when defeated, as defeated he must be, they could have the satisfaction of overthrowing him completely. And, of course, he was defeated. He had known that he would be from the outset. None the less, he did not

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flinch from what he thought to be his duty ; in his heart, in fact, he hoped even yet to achieve the impossible.

"I shall do my duty," he assured his father, "thoroughly, completely, to the very end ; and, provided that I keep my health, I hope by dint of pleading to be able to accomplish my task. I do not count the difficulties and dangers ; they are innumerable. I trust in fate and in my devotion to the Commonwealth. I must leave the rest to the mercy of the gods, if there are any."

In November, after wrestling with countless difficulties, he succeeded at last in forming a Ministry—that ill-fated Ministry which was destined to endure but two-and-seventy days. On January 26, 1882, in fact, it was defeated and its leader hounded from office, pursued by the most bitter accusations. Gambetta had aspired to the dictatorship, his enemies declared—Gambetta, the man whose greatest fault, after all, was the excessive thoroughness of his democratic doctrines.

But he had not left in him the spirit to defend himself ; he was too ill, too disappointed. So he bowed his head to the storm, took a small house in the Rue Saint-Didier, close to Victor Hugo's house, and there retired into seclusion.

And this house, it may be said, was the magnificent mansion which the Bonapartists, who already had charged him with bathing in the Duc de Morny's silver bath while at the Palais Bourbon, now declared that he had

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bought with the proceeds of his plunders while in office. Magnificent mansion, indeed—it was a two-storied house, rented at £120 a year.

Still, to Gambetta it seemed a very palace, for it was there that Léonie came to him, she for whom now he had waited six whole years. Six years—it is a long time out of a statesman's life; and those years had left Gambetta a very different man from him whom they had found. His constitution was shattered; disappointment, responsibilities and care had aged him greatly. One thing only remained with him unchanged—his love for Léonie; that she should come to him was still, as it had ever been since first he met her, the one and all-consuming purpose of his life.

And now she had come. He was very happy; so happy that he hardly dared even to mention the word 'marriage,' for fear of reawakening her dormant scruples, and so losing her again. Still, marry her he would, and before the year had ended—of this he was determined. In confidence he told his father so.

But the latter, it would seem, was careless of the secret. At any rate—"I beg you to say nothing of my marriage," Gambetta wrote to him on October 30. "You must have spoken to some one on the matter, for the *Agence Havas* received a telegram from Nice announcing my marriage. I have had the telegram suppressed; but they are evidently well-informed there. I cannot understand how this comes about, for you are the only person to whom I have mentioned the matter.

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“ I am doing my best to persuade my friend to make up her mind, and I really think I have done some good, thanks to my account of your joy on learning such a piece of news ; but I have not quite conquered her scruples and her opposition, so we must be discreet and avoid all publicity.”

But soon even this need vanished. Exactly what happened never will be known. Did Léonie yield to Gambetta ? Did Gambetta yield to her ? The answer is immaterial. During the autumn they found some way of overcoming the barrier of religion which stood between them. It is this which matters, for Gambetta then realized the epitome of happiness. ‘ In a few weeks Léonie would be his wife ! She had promised to marry him in December ! The man’s joy was boundless.

Forthwith he sought for, found and took a little cottage at Ville d’Avray—Les Jardies he called it—and set to work with boyish enthusiasm to make of it a home for his bride.

This, alas ! fate destined it should never be.

One day, late in November, while playing with a pistol in his study, Gambetta shot himself accidentally in the hand. The wound did not seem serious, but for some reason it refused to heal ; the state of the man’s general health, no doubt, delayed it. Then complications set in ; and in spite of the doctors’ care, in spite of Léonie’s devoted nursing, the patient daily grew weaker. An operation might perhaps have saved

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him, but the doctors feared to perform it; and so on the 31st of December, robbed of his last chance of life, the great patriot passed peacefully away.

And Léonie was left alone, destitute of all resources; Gambetta had given her all he had to give—himself. And now he had gone! For a while she gazed in silent anguish on his face. Then she kissed it lightly on the brow, and went her way—out into the world.

She did not attend the funeral. Gambetta belonged to France. So she left it to France to honour him. She merely mourned him, and she mourned him truly till in 1906 death set her free to join him. Her sorrow was inconsolable, and remorse made it bitter.

Why, why had she been obstinate? Why had she refused to marry him when and as he asked? Oh, why? This became her great lament. And it was of her lover she thought, not of herself. Death had disclosed his secret, and, needless to say, there were some who misunderstood that secret, some even who believed that she had shot him. Gambetta shot by a jealous mistress! The *Petit Journal*, in a glaring article from the pen of a journalist more enterprising than imaginative, stated this to be a fact. No wonder, then, Léonie reproached herself. There was a stain now on the great patriot's memory, and she had caused that stain, she to whom his honour ever had been much more dear than life.

"My tears," she wrote at Rome, only a short while before her death, "can never cease to flow . . . and

The Husband of Charlotte Brontë



CHARLOTTE BRONTË

From the picture by George Richmond

X

THE HUSBAND OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

I

EXCITING happenings are rare at Haworth, so rare, indeed, that almost any happening is deemed exciting. At any rate, this was the case ninety years ago, for Haworth then was merely a small village, perched high on a hill in the wilds of Yorkshire—a bleak, forsaken spot, of little or no interest to the outside world. Since those days, no doubt, the little township has changed considerably, and, like the rest of England, become inured by the progress of civilization to the contingencies of the unexpected. So now, it may be, public interest is roused less easily.

But, in 1820, seven country carts, laden with books and furniture, toiling up the one long street was no ordinary spectacle; and the villagers turned out *en masse* to watch their slow and tedious progress. The sight in itself was excuse enough; but this particular procession held also for them another and quite distinctive interest.

It heralded the advent of the new vicar. And what manner of man might he be? Naturally his parishioners were curious to know; and they made the air buzz with gossip and idle speculation. But they

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were not kept in suspense for long. The object of their curiosity followed in person close in the wake of his household gods.

The Rev. Patrick Brontë was a very ordinary parson—a stern-looking, somewhat bigoted little man, of Irish birth, forty-three years old, and very poor. Eight years before he had married a pretty Cornish girl, six years his junior. She arrived at Haworth with him, a pale, delicate, worn-out woman, the mother of six young children. 'And she was even more fragile than she looked, for her married life had been one incessant struggle. And now she needed rest; rest and warmth and sunshine. 'Haworth certainly was no place for her. Nor did she survive its rigours long. Only eighteen months after her arrival—in September, 1821, to be precise—she died; the first of the Brontës to find a final resting-place in the little churchyard which adjoined the grim and sombre rectory.

Now, if life there had been dull for the children before her death, it became a thousandfold more dull after. They were left almost entirely to their own devices. Their father they very rarely saw, even at meal-times. He suffered from digestive troubles, and so preferred to eat alone, hoping thus to avoid being tempted by forbidden delicacies. Whilst companionship—he neither needed it nor sought it. He allowed parochial duties only to interrupt communion with his books.

His children, then, as was inevitable, grew into wild, imaginative pupils of the moors. The joys

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and adventures of the big world held no attractions for them. The off-spring of a book-worm and a frail, down-trodden little woman, they were quite content amid their own restricted surroundings. But they were all delicate—perhaps because, as babies, poverty had denied them more than the bare necessities of life—whilst sorrow and misfortune dogged their footsteps from the very outset.

In the spring of 1825, the eldest child, Maria, died, aged twelve; and, only five weeks later, the second daughter also, little Elizabeth. But there were still four children left—three girls and one boy. The boy, however, Branwell Brontë, did not make exactly a success of life. This often is the case with parsons' sons, especially when the son in question is the only brother of three doting sisters. Branwell, in fact, became a dissolute young man, and proved himself a constant source of worry to his sisters, and anger to his father, until at last, in 1848, he, too, died, the victim of his own excesses.

Yet, given the chance, he might have done something really great, for he was a youth with much ability. But he happened to possess the artistic temperament—the artistic temperament, no money, a narrow-minded father, and the dullest of country rectories for his home. No wonder, then, he proved a failure.

His sisters, too, possessed his temperament. But to them it came not as a misfortune, but as a blessing, uniting them by the very powerful bond of a wonderful

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companionship, giving them hopes, ideals, and aims which they could share in common, when once again they found themselves united under their father's roof.

Once again—yes, after leaving school, each went out into the world alone, and sought to earn a livelihood by teaching. But in turn each failed. Trained as they had been, the slaves of weird, imaginative fancies, they could not adapt themselves to the social conditions amid which they found themselves. And so it came about that at length they all returned to Haworth, and set to work there to realize their childish dreams—to write.

But they told no one of their endeavours. Strictly in secret they worked and studied feverishly for several years. And this was not difficult, for at Haworth there was nothing to disturb, nobody to question them. Nor did they toil in vain. In the autumn of 1847 the literary world was startled by the appearance of three remarkable novels, "Jane Eyre," "Wuthering Heights," and "Agnes Gray." Who were the authors? Who were Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell? Nobody had ever heard of them. And not even Mr. Brontë suspected for a moment that they were respectively his three daughters—Charlotte, Emily, and Anne.

Indeed, not until the success of her book, "Jane Eyre," was unmistakable and assured did Charlotte tell Mr. Brontë of her enterprise. Then casually she remarked to him one day, "Papa, I've been writing a book."

"Have you, my dear?" was the reply.

"Yes; and I want you to read it."

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The old man smiled indulgently.

"I fear it will try my eyes too much," he said.

"Oh!" Charlotte exclaimed, "but it's not in manuscript—it's printed."

"Printed!" Mr. Brontë was now thoroughly aroused. "Printed?" he asked. "My dear, have you considered the expense? How can such a book get sold? No one even knows your name!"

II

Such was the father of Charlotte Brontë. But she, of course, had learned long ago to understand his curious little ways, so well, perhaps, as not even to feel disappointed by his lack of interest in her, but to see the humour of it. Besides, as she knew, she had now merely to disclose her identity to become a famous woman. There was comfort in that.

And greatly she needed comfort; hers was a heavy heritage of sorrows. In December, 1848, only three months after her brother's death, she lost her sister Emily. And, in the May of the following year, her other sister died. Then Charlotte found herself alone in the world, alone with "Shirley," the child of her brain, as yet unborn; a woman thirty-one years old, not embittered, but made sweet by trouble, and very beautiful. Not that her features were perfect; they were not, though, as Mrs. Gaskell has declared, "unless you began to catalogue them you were hardly aware of

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the fact, for the eyes and the power of the countenance overbalanced every physical defect."

Then again she was heart-whole. This surely is remarkable. Charlotte Brontë heart-whole at the age of thirty-one; Charlotte Brontë, the first novelist to make women in fiction passionate human beings; the writer who, boldly and to the horror of Puritanical critics, broke away from the old tradition and allowed her girl characters to think and feel, endowing them with something more real than the conventional simpering, blushing coyness! It is indeed strange. And she had not even been in love! But already she had received two offers of marriage, two in one year, in fact, her twenty-fourth, before yet she had displayed any promise of literary fame and greatness.

The first suitor, the Rev. Henry Nussey, was a brother of her friend, Ellen Nussey, a really good man too, devout, noble-minded, and sincere. And he loved Charlotte dearly in his own dull, prosaic manner. But she, it would seem, although gratified by his devotion, never for a moment seriously contemplated marrying him, marrying a man who was merely fond of her and whose very nature rendered him incapable of being more.

"Before answering your letter," she wrote to him on March 5, 1839, "I might have spent a long time in consideration of its subject; but as from the first moment of its reception and perusal I determined on what course to pursue, it seemed to me that delay was

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wholly unnecessary. . . . I have no personal repugnance to the idea of a union with you, but I feel convinced that mine is not the sort of disposition calculated to form the happiness of a man like you. It has always been my habit to study the characters of those among whom I chance to be thrown, and I think I know yours and can imagine what description of a woman would suit you for a wife. The character should not be too marked, ardent and original, her temper should be mild, her piety undoubted, her spirits even and cheerful, and her *personal attractions* sufficient to please your eyes and gratify your just pride. As for me, you do not know me; I am not the serious, grave, cool-headed individual you suppose; you would think me romantic and eccentric; you would say I was satirical and severe . . . and I will never, for the distinction of attaining matrimony and escaping the stings of an old maid, take a worthy man whom I am conscious I cannot render happy."

And then she wrote to Ellen: "There were in his proposal," she said, "some things which might have proved a strong temptation. I thought if I were to marry Henry Nussey, his sister could live with me, and how happy I should be. But again I asked myself two questions: Do I love him as much as a woman ought to love the man she marries? Am I the person best qualified to make him happy? Alas! Ellen, my conscience answered '*No*' to both these questions. I felt that . . . I had not, and could not have, that intense attachment which would make me willing to die for

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him; and if ever I marry it must be in the light of that adoration I will regard my husband."

And so it was that she decided she could never bring herself to marry Ellen's brother. That he was a good man she admitted; she admired him greatly; but in him, she saw, she could never realize her own ideal. The man she learned to love—why, she cried, "the whole world, weighed in the balance against his smallest wish, should be light as air." Such a man' only could she marry. To contract a loveless union, she felt, would be more than foolish; it would be a crime. Still, she added, with a touch of pathos: "Ten to one I shall never have the chance ágain: but *n'importe*."

She did, though, and only a few months later. During the summer an old friend of the family came one day to pay a visit at the rectory, and with him he brought a young clergyman, fresh from Dublin University, a lively, clever, witty Irishman. The man amused Charlotte; she talked to him gaily, laughing at his jests without restraint until, as the day wore on, "he began to season his conversation with something of Hibernian flattery."

Then she cooled towards him. This was not at all to her liking. But presently the man departed. And after he had gone, Charlotte thought no more about him until, a few days later, she received a letter in a strange handwriting. Who could the writer be? Consumed with curiosity, she tore open the envelope, and read—surely as ardent a declaration of love as has

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been ever penned. The writer was her young Irish friend.

"I have heard of love at first sight," she declared afterwards, "but this beats all. I leave you to guess . . . my answer." And the nature of that answer, Reader, perhaps you, too, can guess. Charlotte Brontë was not a hare-brained girl. For love, for a true, deep love, she longed; and to it she would have yielded herself utterly and gladly. To that tawdry substitute, an emotional attachment—never.

But that love which she required is a rare and priceless jewel. Many people seek for it; few ever find it. In the end, the great majority, given the chance, clutch feverishly at the sham. This Charlotte would not do; she had studied human nature too carefully; and the study, although it may make one cynical, must also surely make one wise. Thus, as the years rolled on, romance became almost a stranger to her; work absorbed all her energies. Still, she thought a great deal about love—about love and marriage. This her art demanded of her; it demanded that she should understand the emotions of her sex.

None the less, like many a great thinker, she failed utterly to understand her own. Time—Time the great changer of all things—had completely revolutionized her views on life, but so gradually that, in her heart, Charlotte, barely conscious of the change, still continued to cling faithfully to the ideals of her youthful dreams. She did not see that the girl's natural longing

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for a man she could wish to die for, a man whose smallest wish would outweigh in the balance the whole world, had in reality yielded within her to the woman's desire for love, for a someone to care for her and cherish her.

And so she remained deaf to the voice of her maturer judgment. Her true thoughts and aspirations, she revealed—and then almost subconsciously—only in her letters.

“My good girl,” she wrote to Ellen Nussey, “*Une grande passion* is *une grande folie*. Mediocrity in all things is wisdom ; mediocrity in sensations is superlative wisdom.” And then again: “No girl should fall in love till the offer is actually made. This maxim is just. I will even extend and confirm it. No young lady should fall in love till the offer has been made, accepted, the marriage ceremony performed, and the first half-year of married life has passed away. A woman may then begin to love, but with great precaution, very coolly, very moderately, very rationally. If ever she loves so much that a harsh word or a cool look cuts her to the heart she is a fool. If she ever loves so much that her husband's will is her law, and that she has got into the habit of watching his look in order that she may anticipate his wishes, she will soon be a neglected fool.”

A sound doctrine this, no doubt, but a hard one to live up to. To philosophize, as many people find, is easier far than to be a philosopher. And Charlotte

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Brontë, even when she had the opportunity of exemplifying her own wise teaching, woman-like, firmly declined to do so. Her mind may have changed, but her heart still remained unaltered; still it longed, and longed ardently, for the coming of some great, consuming passion such as she never yet had found, and, so it seemed—for already she was thirty-four years old—now never would find.

“Doubtless,” she wrote to Ellen Nussey, in September, 1850, “there are men whom, if I chose to encourage, I might marry; but no matrimonial lot is even remotely offered me which seems truly desirable.”

As a matter of fact, at this time, there were at least two men devotedly in love with her. The first, Mr. James Taylor, was a member of a London firm of publishers. He came down to Haworth one day to see “Currer Bell” with regard to arrangements for the publication of “Shirley,” and fell in love immediately with the author.

Mr. Brontë encouraged his suit. And Charlotte, for her part, considered it earnestly. But no—she decided at last—she could not bring herself to marry him; she did not love him. And the unhappy man, hurt sorely by his rejection, left England, and went to India “to recover.” He was away five years.

“I am sure he has sterling and estimable qualities,” she wrote after he had gone, “but . . . it was impossible for me in my inward heart to think of him as one that might one day be acceptable as my husband.

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. . . I looked for something of the gentleman—something, I mean, of the *natural* gentleman ; you know I can dispense with acquired polish ; and for looks, I know myself too well to think that I have any right to be exacting on that point. I could not find one gleam, I could not see one passing glimpse of true good-breeding. It is hard to say, but it is true. In mind, too, though clever, he is second-rate—thoroughly second-rate. One does not like to say these things, but one had better to be honest. Were I to marry him my heart would bleed in pain and humiliation ; I could not, *could* not look up to him. No, if Mr. Taylor be the only husband fate offers me, single I must always remain.”

111

But James Taylor was not the only husband offered. There was yet another, *the* other, in fact ; an Irishman, called Arthur Nicholls, who, like two of his predecessors, happened also to be a parson. It is not necessary to say more than this about his antecedents. He had not spent an interesting life, and when he arrived for the first time at Haworth in 1844, as Mr. Brontë's curate, he appeared merely as a very “curatey” young curate, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, twenty-seven years of age, moderately good-looking, moderately intelligent and preposterously conscientious. Charlotte he bored ; she admitted this frankly. “I cannot for my life,” she wrote to a friend, “see those interesting germs

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of goodness in him you discovered ; his narrowness of mind always strikes me chiefly. I fear he is indebted to your imagination for his hidden treasure."

None the less he interested her to a certain extent ; enough at any rate to induce her to draw a not unkindly portrait of him as Mr. Macarthy in "Shirley." He was representative of a type and it pleased her to study him. Hence she allowed herself, perhaps, to seek his society more often than otherwise she would have done. And from this, it may be, arose the rumour, which soon began to circulate through Haworth, that she was engaged to be married to him. Engaged to him !—Charlotte denied the report warmly. "A cold, far-away sort of civility," she wrote, "are the only terms on which I have ever been with Mr. Nicholls."

That this was so, Arthur Nicholls knew only too well. And the knowledge was torture to him. He adored his vicar's daughter. For years past he had watched her every movement, studied and admired her, until at length he had fallen completely under the spell of her magic influence. Nor was it her brilliant gift of intellect alone which attracted him, nor yet her literary fame. Indeed, as Mrs. Gaskell has asserted, "this, by itself, would rather have repelled him when he saw it in the possession of a woman," for he was a staid little man, so conservative in his views that he wished women in no way to be emancipated from the thralldom of the home.

But Charlotte Brontë, despite her work, despite her genius, was a true woman. And, as a woman, Arthur

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Nicholls saw her. He had seen her as a daughter, as a sister, as the mistress of her father's house. It was her womanliness that had appealed to him. Not the author, she was the woman he admired, the woman whom he loved ; and he had learned to love her with all that love and reverence which a good, honest man alone can feel, with a devotion that Henry Nussey never could have offered, a passion such as never could have fired the heart of the impressionable young Irishman who once had wooed her. ‘

And yet he could not speak of this great love. He dared not. He knew that Charlotte was indifferent to him, knew what would be her answer. And to be sent away rejected and miserable—no ; it seemed better to worship in secret and from afar. This right, at least, no one could deny him. Besides, what right had he to ask one of the most famous women of the day to marry him, an obscure, unheard-of curate, with the princely income of £100 a year? Love can be very cruel. But Mr. Brontë's curate bore its torments patiently and bravely for several years. Indeed, until the very end of the year 1853, somehow he restrained the torrent of his pent-up feelings.

Then . . . Charlotte has herself described the scene.

“On Monday evening,” she wrote, “Mr. Nicholls was here to tea. I vaguely felt without clearly seeing, as without seeing, I have felt for some time, the meaning of his constant looks and strange, feverish restraint. As usual Mr. Nicholls sat with papa till between eight

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and nine o'clock. I then heard him open the parlour door as if going. I expected the clash of the front door. He stopped in the passage; he tapped; like lightning it flashed on me what was coming. He entered; he stood before me. What his words were you can guess; his manner you can hardly realize; nor can I forget it. Shaking from head to foot, looking deadly pale, speaking low, vehemently, yet with difficulty, he made me for the first time feel what it costs a man to declare affection where he doubts response. . . . He spoke of sufferings he had borne for months, of sufferings he could endure no longer, and craved leave for some hope."

But what hope could Charlotte give? What could she say? She knew not what to do. She found it hard to be cruel, very hard, even though only in order to be kind. So she took the line of least resistance, and asked Mr. Nicholls first to refer the matter to her father. She had a very shrewd idea as to what would be his opinion; so also had Mr. Nicholls. He dared not, he said, approach Mr. Brontë—alone at any rate.

Charlotte replied that she would go with him—and hated herself for saying so. But her hopes had not deceived her. Mr. Brontë, in fact, grew inordinately angry when he heard of his curate's audacity, and so violently did he swear and rave at the unhappy man that even Charlotte was moved to indignation and to pity, forgetful for the moment that her father was acting exactly as she had hoped he would.

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The truth is, Mr. Brontë, having never in his life done anything to help his daughter, attributed her success almost entirely to his own unaided efforts. Charlotte knew this; she knew that her father now longed to see her make a brilliant marriage. Hence her appeal to him. And hence, also, what happened subsequently. By his very violence, in fact, Mr. Brontë did much to defeat both his own and Charlotte's object, for where pity ends and love begins no man can say, the one often is mistaken for the other; and pity Mr. Brontë most certainly had awakened in his daughter's heart, pity and a sense of real regret for her brutal conduct.

But surely Mr. Nicholls' wretched, hapless lot would have stirred any woman's pity. For days, the unhappy man neither ate nor spoke, refusing to see anybody, barely moving outside the door of his house, the pattern of abject misery.

And his behaviour puzzled Charlotte greatly. Was his distress genuine? Or was he suffering merely from a wounded pride? She could not tell. "He never was agreeable or amiable," she wrote, "and is less so now than ever, and alas! I do not know him well enough to be sure that there is truth and true affection or only rancour and corroding disappointment at the bottom of his chagrin. In this state of things I must be and I am entirely passive. I may be losing the purest gem, and to me far the most precious life can give—genuine attachment—or I may be escaping the yoke of a morose temper."

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Yet could her woman's instincts not have known the truth? Surely they must have told her that she was robbing herself of that very gift which she required to make her life complete. Be this as it may, she did not yet relent. Nor yet did Arthur Nicholls abandon hope; still he clung grimly to his post. Not until the following May did he at last admit defeat and decide to go away from Haworth.

Then, on the eve of his departure, he called at the rectory to bid farewell to the man with whom he had worked for ten long years. The vicar received him alone; and Mr. Nicholls left the house without even hearing Charlotte's voice. "But," the latter wrote afterwards, "perceiving that he stayed long before going out of the gate and remembering his long grief, I took courage, and went out, trembling and miserable. I found him leaning against the garden door in a paroxysm of anguish, sobbing as a woman never sobbed. Of course, I went straight to him. Very few words were exchanged, those few barely articulate. Several things I should have liked to ask him were swept entirely from my memory. Poor fellow! But he wanted such hope and encouragement as I could never give him."

It was a sorry scene. "However," was Charlotte's comment, "he is gone—gone, and there's an end to it." Yes; but an end which proved merely to be the true beginning. After Mr. Nicholls' departure, Charlotte felt strangely lonely at Haworth; a sort of emptiness

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crept into her life ; and the future now loomed before her, blank and desolate. "In all this," she wrote, "it is not I who am to be pitied at all, and, of course, nobody pities me. They all think in Haworth that I have disdainfully refused him. If pity would do Mr. Nicholls any good, he ought to have and I believe has it."

But Charlotte needed pity too ; in her heart she knew it. The villagers had understood Mr. Nicholls better than she had. Perhaps then, she felt, after all they were right in their belief. Perhaps she had thrown deliberately away that which to her was the most precious gem that life could offer—a "genuine attachment." And she regretted bitterly her hasty action.

Mr. Brontë, also, regretted his. He missed his late curate sadly, for, although he tried several in his place, he could not find another who suited him.

So it came about that, one day in April, 1854, his daughter timidly suggested that he should ask Mr. Nicholls to return. Her father wondered at the suggestion, but consented to it, although he knew—so of course did Charlotte—what that return would mean. Mr. Nicholls knew also. That perhaps was why he came.

And he came immediately.

IV

"While thankful," Charlotte wrote, a few weeks later, "to One who seems to have guided me through much difficulty, much and deep distress and perplexity of mind, I am still very calm, very inexpectant. What

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I taste of happiness is of the soberest order. I trust my husband. I am grateful for his tender love to me. I believe him to be an affectionate, a conscientious, a high-principled man; and if with this I should yield to regrets that fine talents, congenial tastes and thoughts are not added, it seems to me I should be most presumptuous and thankless."

Nor had Mr. Nicholls been deceived in himself. He knew exactly what were Charlotte's feelings for him; knew that she entertained for him no more than a respect and passive liking. But he had no fears for the future; he relied on the strength of his own great devotion in the end to win her for him utterly. And in this spirit he almost forced her to become his wife, this woman who had known so many of life's sorrows, so few of its joys.

The ceremony was performed very quietly in the little church at Haworth on the 29th of June. And on that day ended the career of the author of "Jane Eyre," "Shirley," and "Villette." Thenceforth she ceased to be a novelist. She found it impossible to work and also be a wife. "Whenever Arthur is in," she declared, "I must have occupations in which he can share, or which will not at least divert my attention from him—thus a multitude of little matters get put off till he goes out, and then I am quite busy."

Exacting, Arthur Nicholls may have been, but such he intended to be; he wished to have a woman for his wife, not merely a genius. Despite, then, his little

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tyrannies, he proved himself a rare, devoted husband ; and Charlotte never had occasion to regret that she had married him. At any rate, she wedded in strict accordance with her own philosophy. "No young lady,"—so she once declared—"should fall in love till the offer has been made, accepted, the marriage ceremony performed, and the first half-year of wedded life has passed away."

In applying her own theories to herself, however, Charlotte made two mistakes. When she married, she forgot that she was no longer a *young* lady ; and, before falling in love, she waited not for a half, but nearly a whole year.

It was the 31st of March, in fact, 1855, Mrs. Nicholls, then on the verge of motherhood, woke from a long and heavy sleep—and, opening her tired eyes, looked around her. Then she noticed her husband. He was kneeling at her bedside, praying.

Feebly she stretched out her hand towards him. "I'm not going to die, am I?" she said. "He will not separate us. We have been *so* happy." The words were barely audible, but they were almost the last that Charlotte Brontë ever said. Her mission in life already had been fulfilled.

A few hours later a solemn booming of the bell above the church told Haworth that the last of the parson's children had sunk into her final sleep.

Then Mr. Nicholls once more went out into the world alone—a man who had loved once, but surely not in vain.

King George III
and Hannah Lightfoot



GEORGE, PRINCE OF WALES


AFTERWARDS KING GEORGE III

From an engraving after a painting by R. Houston

XI

KING GEORGE III AND HANNAH LIGHTFOOT

I

HE reputed marriage of King George III and Hannah Lightfoot is one of the most profound and fascinating mysteries in all the annals of romance. Nothing can be proved with certainty concerning it; it is as traditional as the story of King Alfred burning the cakes. For this reason, some people cleverly maintain that Hannah Lightfoot was a myth. But this is ridiculous.

Undoubtedly she existed. Undoubtedly King George III, as Prince of Wales, met her, loved her, and eloped with her. But what happened after this no man can tell; the veil of mystery is impenetrable. Did the Prince marry her? Did he have children by her? Where did she live? When did she die? One can only conjecture. Documentary evidence is scant and unreliable.

Still, there are countless legends, and legend invariably is based at least on fact. Besides, so many are the legends, and from such different sources do they spring, that it would be absurd to regard them all as

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fiction. In detail they may be false; in substance they must be true. And it is from this tangled mass of legend and tradition that the story of the romance, as printed on these pages, has been woven into a consecutive narrative. Of course, it cannot claim to be authentic. None the less, it approaches surely very near the truth. Perhaps the very mystery which surrounds the facts supports this argument.

Secrets are not kept without good reason.

The love affairs of most royal personages are common knowledge. King George IV's entanglement with Mrs. Fitzherbert, for example, was recognized even in public. But in that case there was no need for mystery, the Hanoverian dynasty being then firmly established on the throne. Besides, the Royal Marriage Act of 1772, which made it impossible for a member of the Royal Family to marry without the King's consent, *ipso facto*, rendered the union legally invalid.

When George III, on the other hand, is alleged to have married Hannah Lightfoot, this Bill had not been passed. By right, therefore, the Quaker bride would, in due course, have become Queen; her descendants heirs to the throne; and the King himself, after his subsequent marriage to Princess Charlotte, guilty of an offence no less than bigamy.

Hence the need for secrecy. Yet how that secret came to be preserved is a truth utterly mysterious; though one, it may be, which throws a not ungracious light both upon George and Hannah. The woman,

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at any rate—be this story more than idle fable—clearly did not marry for position; she married because she loved, and she asked only for love in return for the love she gave. Unlike the Court ladies of her day, Hannah was not an ambitious, self-seeking woman, but, in reality, the dear, sweet, simple little Quaker girl of legend.

And, as such, George loved her, loved her dearly. Of this there can be no doubt. Not until he became King did he desert her and take to himself a royal consort. And he hated himself even then for doing so; indeed—and this is the truth—he yielded to the advice of his ministers only in obedience to that real sense of public duty which was his, and which singles him out, despite his faults, as at least the most sincere and noble-hearted man among the Hanoverian Kings.

What Hannah Lightfoot meant to him he told to no man. This stands greatly to his credit, for he lived, it must be remembered, in an age when a man was esteemed among his fellows in proportion to the number and the daring of his love affairs. It was fashionable to be a cad.

The status of women, in fact, and the ideal of womanhood never have been lower than they were during the days of George's boyhood. Marriage was a mere name, a farce, a convenience, and, at any rate, prior to the passing of the "Act for the Preventing of Clandestine Marriages," in 1753—an Act, incidentally, which met with unqualified opposition from almost every

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section of the community—the holy state of matrimony was literally an odious commodity, bought and sold in an open market.

Between October 19, 1704, and February 12, 1705, no fewer than 2,942 marriages were “solemnized” at the Fleet alone, without the publication of banns, even without licence; whilst at his chapel in Brookfield Market Place, now Curzon Street, the notorious Alexander Keith united in a single day as many as one hundred couples.

This amazing gentleman readily dispensed with all formality. He asked no awkward questions, he made no inquiries; the presence of witnesses—provided, of course, that he received his fees—he regarded as quite unnecessary; he did not even insist upon the signing of the register. And, on more than one occasion, he is said to have married a woman to another woman in order to enable her thereby to evade her debts by saying that she had a husband somewhere who could be held responsible for them.

Now Keith was but one among many. The Church, in fact, had fallen into a lamentable state of debasement; and her servants, especially the lower clergy, tempted, no doubt, by the wretched smallness of their stipends, instead of acting as the guardians of morality, grew fat and rich and profligate by legalizing vice.

On several occasions, Pennant declared, writing in 1778, while walking in the neighbourhood of the Fleet prison, he had been accosted by the parson, who prowled

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up and down outside, and tempted with this question "Sir, will you be pleased to walk in and be married?" And there were countless so-called clergymen willing to perform such ceremonies. A dram of gin or a roll of tobacco often proved reward enough. Yet, according to the law, bigamy was a crime punishable with death.

Now this state of affairs, incredible though it may seem, has an important bearing on the story of Hannah Lightfoot. Perhaps, too, it helps further to account for the mystery which surrounds her life. At any rate, King George gave ample proof of his good endeavour to preserve the sanctity of marriage in this country, and to promote the dignity of women. During his reign in fact, more was done by legislation to achieve this end than during any other age in history. Perhaps, the one is justified in saying that, as Prince of Wales, he had the good taste to rise above the meanness of his environment and to be so foolish as to entertain a pure and noble passion for a pure and noble woman.

George loved Hannah Lightfoot; loved her as a woman should be loved, and revered her. So he kept his love a secret. It was much too precious to be paraded before the vulgar gaze, much too sacred to be corroded by the breath of scandal. Is this unreasonable theory?

As a king, George III has been much maligned; and there still is a tendency to scoff at and belittle his talents. Still, in spite of all, it was while he sat on

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throne that Britain rose at last triumphant amid her enemies, and established the mightiest empire in the world. The work of great Ministers, you say. True—but he is a great king who knows how to use to the full the genius of his servants. Surely, then, one may at least credit him with ideals both as a monarch and a man.

These ideals his mother implanted in him. She was a really good woman—perhaps this explains her intense unpopularity in the country—and from the very outset determined to prevent her son from becoming tainted by the profligacy of the Court. And the Court of his grandfather, King George II, was notorious even among the notorious Courts of Europe. But the heir to the throne, thanks to a mother's wisdom, passed his childhood in comparative seclusion at Leicester House. There he lived in an atmosphere of almost suburban respectability. Nor did he suffer through it. On the contrary, although a son of the disreputable Frederick⁴ Louis, Prince of Wales, he grew to become a clean, healthy-minded young Englishman. "A nice boy," one writer calls him. It is a fitting description.

Brilliant he may not have been; but he possessed a goodly store of common sense, and to a prince this is a quality perhaps of greater value even than are brains. What is more, 'unlike his forbears, he was gifted with imagination, and something approaching a real love for beauty. Thus he became a patron of the arts, not merely because he happened to have been born a prince,

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but because he appreciated lovely things, and liked to associate with, and use his power of honouring, those who made them.

Is it to be wondered at, then, that he became a sentimentalist? Surely it is only the natural corollary. At any rate, he *did* become a sentimentalist. And this is the only answer that can be given to those who laugh at the suggestion that, at the age of nineteen-and-a-half, he could have fallen seriously in love—this, and the fact that at the age of fifteen-and-a-half he did fall seriously in love, and needless to say with a woman much older than himself. But, in those days, it was only fit and proper for a boy to fall in love; one could not begin too young. Besides, there is such a thing as calf-love. What does Calverley say?

“The people say that she was blue,
But I was green, and loved her dearly;
She was approaching thirty-two
And I was eleven, nearly.”

Some authorities, incidentally, declare that George was only eleven years of age when first he met Hannah Lightfoot. This, it would seem, is doubtful. None the less, there is a delightful picture of the boy prince dallying, during a stay at Hampton Court, with the object of his youthful passion.

“On Richmond Hill there lives a lass
More bright than May-day morn;
Whose charms all other maids surpass,
A rose without a thorn.

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This lass so neat, with smile so sweet,
Hath won my right good will ;
I'd crowns resign to call thee mine,
Sweet lass of Richmond Hill."

Still, one must pass this story by as fable. Besides, there is no need to burden Hannah Lightfoot with the onerous *rôle* of the "Sweet lass of Richmond Hill"; she is sufficiently fascinating alone as the "Fair Quaker." And as such George first saw her some time later; in fact one evening when going to the opera with his parents.

II

Now the Opera House then occupied the site at present filled by His Majesty's Theatre, and apparently at the back of the building was an entrance specially reserved for the use of the Royal Family. This door opened into Market Street, a narrow passage which ran from Pall Mall to Jermyn Street. Now at the Pall Mall corner of Market Street stood the shop of a certain Mr. Wheeler, a linen draper, and, it would seem, a successful one—perhaps because he always kept a cask of good ale with which to regale his customers.

Now it was there, sitting in the shop window to watch the royal procession pass, that Prince George first saw Hannah Lightfoot.

At the time he could have had but a fleeting glance of her, for the royal party were as usual proceeding to the opera in chairs, attended only by footmen and, perhaps, a

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dozen Yeomen of the Guard. But that one glance was enough. George had seen and had been conquered. Nor later did the vision of the blushing maiden's beauty prove to have been a sweet illusion.

But how came Hannah to be at Mr. Wheeler's shop? Well, partly because Mr. Wheeler was a Quaker, and therefore a man given to good works; but chiefly because he had need of somebody to assist him in the management of his business, and, incidentally, of his large and growing family.

As a matter of fact, Hannah was his niece, the only daughter, it would seem, of his sister, Mary, whose husband, Matthew* Lightfoot, shoemaker, of Wapping, had died in 1732, leaving his family in desperate poverty. Perhaps, then, the girl had been fortunate to find a home in her uncle's house. But she had to work there; indeed, every moment of her day was occupied—not that she objected, for being a Quaker, work came to her as second nature. Still, despite her Quaker training, perhaps because of it, she took a very live interest in the grand world and in people of high degree. So it happened that on the evening in question she came to be sitting in the shop window—after closing hour—a demure and charming little figure.

Now perhaps it was this, her very simplicity, which won Prince George's fancy. In her sombre but dainty Quaker dress, unpainted, unpatched, quite free from artificiality, she must have appeared in delightfully refreshing contrast to the ladies with whom normally he

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came in contact, for, as already has been said, George was "a nice boy." And without a doubt the little shop girl was very beautiful. Indeed, an unknown writer has declared, "With her dainty little head running over with golden curls, large blue eyes dancing with merriment or mischief, dimpled cheeks with a bloom as delicate as any peach, and with as *petite* a figure as that of a sylph, we cannot wonder that Hannah, whose charms were enhanced by her demure Quaker dress, set going pit-a-pat the hearts of every gallant whose eyes fell on so fair a vision."

Unfortunately, this dainty description does not tally with the only known portrait of Hannah, a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds—and why did Sir Joshua paint her if this story be all a myth? Here she is seen as a dark-eyed girl, with an expression hauntingly sad and pensive. But this picture belongs to a later date when sorrow had already told its tale upon her face.

Still *petite*, Hannah most certainly could not have been. Short, it is true, she was; but short and plump—"rather disposed to *embonpoint*," one critic tactfully remarks. And as "the possessor of a fair, unsullied face," she could not fail, we are told, to attract attention at a time when small-pox had left but few women unmarked.

Be this as it may, Hannah was pretty—fact and legend are unanimous—bewitchingly pretty. She enslaved the Prince immediately. One glance was



HANNAH LIGHTFOOT

Portrait painted by the artist, J. G. Reynolds

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enough. Henceforth he found frequent occasion to attend the opera; Market Street came invariably to be included in the itinerary of his daily walks and daily rides; and, it is said, he used often to visit Mr. Wheeler's shop, and there—for I suspect that Mr. Wheeler dealt mainly in ladies' underclothing—buy the most useless and absurd apparel.

Now could Hannah have been so innocent as not to guess the reason of this patronage? She may have been a simple little maid, but still she was a woman, and somewhere within her woman's soul she must have entertained a woman's hopes, ambitions, and love for admiration. And the admiration of Prince George—it was not a gift lightly to be waived aside.

He was an attractive boy, taller than most of the Hanoverian princes, strong, well-made and dignified, with a clear complexion, regular features, twinkling eyes, and the very whitest of white teeth; in fact, he was just what an English prince should be. And his smile—it even turned the hearts of the *blasé* ladies about Court. But they never saw the ardent love-glances which Hannah saw!

Surely, then, although he was six or seven years her junior, clad in his princely clothes, his hair powdered, a jewelled sword at his side, he must have appeared to Hannah a veritable god. What a contrast to the men whom she was accustomed to meet in her uncle's parlour! Yet that he would ever deign to speak to her she hardly ventured to imagine, even in her dreams.

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But the Prince, for his part, soon began to see that it would be quite impossible for him to rest content for ever, worshipping from afar, with only an occasional stolen word upon which to feed his love. Something must be done, and done immediately. That became very clear. So he set about forthwith to find a someone in whom he could confide, and who would help him to gain the *entrée* to that mysterious inner room in Mr. Wheeler's house. But whom could he seek? That was his difficulty. The problem certainly was one which called for very discreet and serious consideration.

III

Now George was no fool. And in selecting that someone he displayed a wisdom worthy of a more mature, experienced man. In short, his choice fell upon Elizabeth Chudleigh, the arch-adventuress of the day, the very woman to do what he required of her.

She had begun life in quite a humble way, but owing partly to her own determination, and partly to her beauty, had secured, at an absurdly early age, the appointment of maid of honour to George's mother, the Princess of Wales. And at Court, despite the Princess's strict notions on decorum, she contrived to lead a life of reckless gaiety, until, after playing havoc with the hearts of every available and eligible member of the peerage, she condescended eventually to bestow her hand upon the youthful Duke of Hamilton.

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While he was abroad, however, completing his education she carried on a violent flirtation with a young naval officer, called Hervey—of course, merely *pour passer le temps*, for Hervey, being only a nephew to the Earl of Bristol, was, in Elizabeth's eyes, hardly worth worrying about, although, it is true, he stood a very fair chance of succeeding to the barony of Howard de Walden and a half of the estates of the Earl of Portsmouth.

Still, what was this in comparison to a dukedom? A mere nothing. But, alas, contrary to the old adage about fond hearts and absence, her ducal lover, while abroad, seemed to forget completely the existence of the fair enchantress awaiting him at home. Never a word did she hear from him. And, as perhaps was only natural, piqued by this seeming indifference, she allowed her *affaire* with the other man to become more serious, until at last, partly because she could see no other means of satisfying Hervey's adoration, but mainly because the idea struck her as being romantic and bizarre, she eloped with him.

What she had done in haste she began immediately to repent at leisure. Indeed, the folly of her act was only too apparent. And to make matters worse, she did not even like the man whom she had married.

How could she then have been so silly, she angrily demanded of herself, as to endanger her position at Court by contracting such an alliance? Fortunately Hervey had gone to sea soon after the ceremony. For

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the present, then, her secret was safe. Of course, many people must have guessed the truth, but this did not perturb Elizabeth greatly ; she made a point of knowing so many of other people's secrets that nobody dared retail her own. She knew this. And so, when it suited her convenience, she had no compunction in herself declaring the marriage null and void. Nor did she even trouble to secure a judicial confirmation of her own decree. It was absurd, she thought, to regard so haphazard and slipshod a contract as legally binding.

In 1769, therefore, when the opportunity presented itself, she allowed herself duly, and without a single twinge of conscience, to be wedded to the Duke of Kingston. The wedding was the most brilliant social function of the season ; for days it was the talk of London ; and King George III, accompanied by his queen, attended the ceremony in person.

No sooner had she become Duchess of Kingston than Hervey, quite unexpectedly, succeeded to a vast fortune and the earldom of Bristol ! Such a contingency Elizabeth never for a moment had anticipated ; she had no idea that even Fate could be so whimsical. Still, she did not allow the humour of the situation to be wasted on her ; and found much comfort in the thought that it was certainly more interesting to be a duchess and a bigamist than merely a humdrum, respectable countess.

Still, she was somewhat worried ; her present position, to say the least of it, was dangerous. But

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for a while everything went well; so well, in fact, that Elizabeth was just beginning to think she had needlessly alarmed herself, when, with a paralysing suddenness, the bomb of her own creation burst.

She found herself called upon to answer to a charge of bigamy. At the time she was abroad—in Rome, I believe; where she had just been received with almost regal honours by the Pope—and nothing was further from her mind than the publicity of the Law Courts.

At any rate—so she consoled herself—the inevitable must happen sooner or later. Undaunted, therefore, she claimed her rights as Countess of Bristol (!), and insisted on the case being heard in the House of Lords.

Of course, she lost it. But defeat did not drain her resources. England had become impossible to her; that was all. So she set about to find fresh worlds to conquer, and, what is more, she conquered them—first, the Court of Russia, then that of Frederick the Great.

Such, then, was the woman whom Prince George chose as his *confidante*. And how could he have made a wiser choice? One surely can picture Elizabeth listening to the shy story of his love, caressing him with her voice, sympathizing with his chivalry, promising her help, and all the while wondering how much she stood to make out of the transaction.

For in these, the early days of her career, money was essential to her—she had none save what she earned by

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her wits. But George, no doubt, cared nothing for the expense; at any rate when he found that his agent arranged everything to perfection, and enabled him to keep safe and secret trysts with his little Quaker girl at the house of a certain Mr. Perryn, who lived in the village of Knightsbridge.

These meetings were very bliss indeed; they amply justified the cost. And, since Mr. Perryn was one of Hannah's uncles, his house, of course, was an eminently proper place of meeting. Elizabeth Chudleigh must have wheedled the man very cleverly. Indeed, despite his austere Quakerism, she made him quite romantic, and, when he died, he left Hannah an annuity of £40.

But, before long, news of those secret meetings reached the ears of the Prince's mother, and his tutor, the Earl of Bute. They very easily put one and one together, and although they thought the affair to be merely a youthful infatuation, decided that it must be stopped immediately.

But how? To whom, could so delicate a mission be entrusted? Why not to Elizabeth Chudleigh? Bute hated the woman—she knew too much about him—none the less, he admitted her qualifications. In his opinion, he said, the Princess could not make a better choice. And so the matter was settled, for Elizabeth, needless to say, accepted the task readily; the situation appealed to her; it seemed to provide infinite possibilities of artistic treatment. Besides,

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with careful management, her dual duties should prove highly remunerative.

First, then, she set to work to pacify the Prince's mother. There was nothing to worry about, she said. A husband must be found for Hannah. That was all. Probably she would live very happily with him. And King Cophetua would very soon forget his little beggar-maid.

What could be simpler?

Then, no doubt, she spun a similar story to Mr. Wheeler, appealing to his Quaker conscience to assist her in removing the girl from danger. Now Mr. Wheeler, thoroughly alarmed by Mistress Chudleigh's words—until then he had no idea that the blight of royal favour had fallen on one of the daughters of his house—readily agreed to every proposition that she made. In fact, he knew not how to be grateful enough to this dazzling lady who had come from Court most graciously to help him in his hour of need, and to avert from his Quaker home so unthinkable a tragedy as scandal.

Together, the two of them, the anxious draper and the arch-adventuress, set about to find a mate for Hannah. Eventually they chose a man named Axford, the son of a grocer who lived on Ludgate Hill. Why they selected him, it is not easy to understand, for he was much younger than Hannah, and apparently one of the very few men who did not want to marry her. But fortunately he was poor, and the promise of

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a handsome dower served admirably as a bribe. And, indeed, it should have. A handsome dower, a handsome wife—grocers' assistants do not meet with such offers every day! Immediately, therefore, a ceremony was arranged. It took place on December 11, 1753, at Keith's celebrated chapel.

But Hannah! Cannot one picture her feelings, and pity her, as she stood before the altar by the side of this mean little grocer's assistant? Demure, obedient little girl, she had not courage to resist; none the less, sorrow and disappointment surged through her pulses. "Place not your trust in princes—place not your trust in princes." The saying echoed, and re-echoed through her mind. Now, at last, she realized its truth.

And yet, was not *her* prince, *her* George the very pattern of all chivalry? Oh why, then, she prayed, as mechanically she swore "to love, cherish, and to obey" a man whom she disliked intensely, could he not come and, like the princes of her fairy tales, save her from her hideous fate?

That love's young dream should end thus abruptly—it was more than she could bear. Place and power, she cared for neither; love was all she wanted, the love of her gay young cavalier. Tears, bitter tears, aught but bride-like, welled to her eyes as, leaning on her husband's arm, she walked slowly down the chancel steps, down the aisle, and so out of the church.

At that very moment a coach dashed up, drawn by

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four steaming horses. It stopped before the church. A man jumped out. A moment later Hannah was lying helpless in his arms, being lifted bodily into the carriage. A postillion slammed the door. A whip cracked. And, before the poor startled little bride had time to realize what was happening, the heavy carriage rolled away, leaving the new-fledged bridegroom standing, amazed and helpless, in the doorway of the church.

Just then a woman slipped away unnoticed through the curious little crowd which had assembled. She had come purposely to witness this comedy, and her eyes sparkled with merriment.

The woman was Elizabeth Chudleigh.

And presently, when Hannah dared open her eyes again, she found herself seated in the coach by the side of George, Prince of Wales !

IV

Until that dramatic moment when he arrived before the church, the Prince, of course, had been sublimely ignorant as to Hannah's intended marriage. But surely he must have realized something was wrong. Perhaps Elizabeth had told him that his mother was watching him, and that for the present, therefore, he must neither communicate with nor expect to hear from Hannah. No doubt, this explanation satisfied. He trusted his agent implicitly.

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Then suddenly one morning—the morning of December 11—he received word from her, bidding him hasten to Keith's Chapel with all speed, prepared for any emergency.

Forthwith he summoned his coach—by some strange chance he found it ready, waiting!—jumped in, and set out for Mayfair. Not a moment had been wasted, and he arrived before Keith's Chapel just as the bride and bridegroom were emerging. At a glance he realized the situation. To delay, obviously would be fatal. With scant courtesy, therefore, as already has been shown, he pushed Master Axford on one side, his body quivering with emotion, his eyes aflame with love and anger, seized Hannah in his arms, and bundled her into the coach, shouting to the postillions to drive—drive anywhere. They had already received their orders; and the coach rumbled off.

But Master Axford, what of him? What did he do? For a moment, dazed and bewildered by the suddenness of the unexpected, he knew not what to think, or how to act.

At this one cannot wonder. Romance—Romance with a big R—very, very rarely penetrated the small world in which he lived. He was merely a grocer's assistant, quite dull, very respectable. And, really, the situation in which he found himself might have surprised a man very much more experienced in such matters.

Yet Master Axford, for all that, was a man of spirit. It is true he cared but little for Hannah; he had

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married mainly for her dower, and that he had received already. None the less, he could not stand tamely by, and allow her to be kidnapped on her wedding-day before his very eyes. No man can tolerate being fooled.

So he called bravely for a horse. Some one lent him one. He mounted in haste, and perhaps none too gracefully, gathered the reins in his hands, and set out in hot pursuit. But a long start had been secured by the Prince's coach, and now it appeared no more than a speck in the far distance. Still, the untrammelled horseman gained ground rapidly, and soon approached within hailing distance. At yontler turnpike, surely he could not fail to overtake the fugitives. He dared even to rein in his horse a little, and, summoning all the courage and dignity at his command, schooled himself for the great moment.

But then—"Royal Family! Royal Family!"—he could hear the voice of the postillion clearly. Instantly the gate swung open, and the coach passed through without being checked, even for a minute, in its mad, reckless course. But before the horseman could follow, the heavy barrier had closed again with a clang of triumph.

"Zounds!" Utterly exasperated, and, indeed, not without reason, Master Axford waxed angry, and fumbled in his pockets for a coin. Haste made him clumsy; and his indignation, instead of hurrying the turnpike man, only provoked him to ribald merriment.

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Thus several precious minutes were wasted before the outraged husband found himself again upon the road ; and by that time the coach had already disappeared from sight. Still he hastened forward, and now with a renewed determination, until at length he arrived at cross roads.

Here his troubles began in very earnest. Which way had the fugitives taken ? He could only guess. So he tried each road in turn ; but without success. He had lost them, lost them utterly ; and from then until the day of his death, he neither saw nor heard again from Hannah Lightfoot. She vanished completely.

Nor can posterity even trace her wanderings. What remains to be told of her history is pure conjecture. That on, April 17, 1759, she went through some form of marriage with the Prince of Wales, this may be accepted as tolerably authentic. What happened subsequently is all mysterious.

It would seem, however, that after he had successfully eluded Master Axford, the Prince drove Hannah to some safe place of refuge, either at Kew or Richmond—perhaps ultimately he took her to the house of his old friend, Mr. Perryn of Knightsbridge. There, at any rate, he could continue his rudely interrupted wooing without further danger, and without offending the proprieties, while making definite arrangement for the future. Something of this sort must have happened, since, for a while, Hannah continued to communicate regularly with her mother.

These letters, though not available for reproduction,

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are, it is said, still in existence, and in them frequent reference is made to "a Person," "a certain Person," "the Person." Now, who could this "Person" have been?

Master Axford? No, surely not; Hannah had no occasion to allude to him so guardedly. Then the Prince? Ah! who else? And in her letters Hannah makes it clear how much she loved him, and how implicitly she trusted him. So long as it was in his keeping, she had no fear for the future. At this time, then, George must have had, at any rate, free and easy access to her.

But quite suddenly those letters ceased; and thenceforth it is impossible to find anywhere an authentic reference to Hannah Lightfoot. What happened no man can tell; even legend is silent. Perhaps some one betrayed the lovers. Or perhaps—this is the most likely theory—Bute and the Prince's mother, for a second time surprised their secret, and forthwith took steps—possibly again with Elizabeth Chudleigh's connivance—to whisk the girl away to some place where George could not even hope to find her.

Be this as it may, in some way the secret leaked out, or something happened which made it necessary for the Prince and Hannah temporarily, at any rate, to separate. And it is a significant fact that, at about this same time, the Society of Friends should solemnly have expelled Hannah from their order. It would be ridiculous to maintain that so severe a step was taken simply because

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she married Isaac Axford. He was an eminently respectable young man, quite eligible, and, although not himself a Quaker, certainly came of a Quaker family. Moreover, although the Society of Friends discussed the affairs of Hannah Lightfoot at several meetings, not once is her husband mentioned by name in the minute-book.

Surely, then, it was not to the Axford marriage that the good Quakers took exception, but to Hannah's subsequent entanglement with the Prince. The Quakers certainly knew something—something which they dared not voice in public or in that plain-spoken language which is the proud boast of their order.

But George was far too ardent a young wooer to be baffled by so small an obstacle as the disappearance of his lady-love. Find her he would ; he swore to himself that he would never rest until he had. Mystery only whetted his determination.

And find her he did—eventually. Where or when or how is not on record. All that can be said is that he found her, and that, on April 17, 1759, he married her.

But how could he marry her ? Was she not already wedded to Isaac Axford ?¹

¹ According to one theory, the Prince really was married to Hannah Lightfoot at Keith's Chapel on December 11, 1753, Axford acting merely as proxy at the ceremony. This is an ingenious belief and by no means unromantic. Nor does it disprove the story as narrated in these pages. On the contrary it merely makes it necessary to regard the subsequent elopement as a splendid piece of bluff, magnificently stage-managed, perfectly acted. And this perhaps is not at all improbable.

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Of course she was. But according to the terms of the Act for Preventing Clandestine Marriages, the marriage would certainly have been held invalid. Now, although it did not come into force until Lady Day, 1754, the Bill had been passed by Parliament in June, 1753, six months prior to the Axford-Lightfoot wedding. From its provisions, moreover, Jews, Quakers (both sects have strict ceremonials of their own), and members of the Royal Family were deliberately excluded.

It might have been passed, then, directly to accommodate George and Hannah, for Axford, being neither Jew nor Quaker, was bound down to its terms, whilst Hannah, being a Quaker, and George, a member of the Royal Family, were left free to marry, as they liked.

The Society of Friends alone could take exception to Hannah's actions, and they had taken exception already, and emphatically.

And then, again, even the conscientious Master Axford eventually took the law into his own hands and, without troubling to have his former marriage rescinded, led another woman to the altar—this time the lady of his choice, a certain Mary Bartlett.

Before taking this step, it is true, he waited six long years, and left no stone unturned which might reveal a clue to Hannah's whereabouts. So perhaps one cannot regard his action as unjustified. Nor was it so rash as it may seem. At any rate, Master Axford had no occasion to fear a charge of bigamy, since a public

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inquiry into his affairs would clearly lead to undesirable disclosures.

Even he was shrewd enough to realize this, and shrewd enough, moreover, to delay his marriage with Mary Bartlett until the summer of 1759. Now George is alleged to have married Hannah Lightfoot in the April of that self-same year. Certainly, then, it would seem that Axford had heard of that ceremony, heard enough, at any rate, to make him feel safe in following his future monarch's lead.

But *did* George go through a form of marriage with Hannah Lightfoot? That is the important question. Officially, of course, the marriage has been denied repeatedly; reasons of State have rendered such denials necessary.

None the less, a just and impartial consideration of the evidence can lead only to one verdict. In the first place, although hot-headed and impetuous, George, Prince of Wales, was not a rake. He was "a nice boy," and it is most improbable that he would have been content merely with an irregular alliance. And it is surely still more improbable that Hannah ever would have sanctioned such a tie—even with a prince. She had been trained strictly as a Quaker and is known to have been a girl with deep convictions. Nor did George escape their influence. He always took great interest in the Quaker movement.

Again, there is the evidence of the marriage certificate. As a matter of fact, this probably is worthless,

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for two certificates have been produced. According to the one the ceremony was performed at Kew, according to the other, at Peckham. But both agree as to the name of the officiating clergyman; both, moreover, agree as to the date. And the contention that some sort of wedding did take place is perhaps supported by the following document:—

• “This is to certify to all it may concern that I lawfully married George, Prince of Wales, to Hannah Lightfoot, April 17th, 1759, and that two sons and a daughter were their issue by such marriage.

“ J. WILMOT,
“ CHATHAM,
“ J. DUNNING.”

Now this and all other papers relating to the marriage were produced in court in 1866, during the hearing of the celebrated case of “*Ryves v. Attorney-General*.” Of course, they were condemned as forgeries; the judges had no alternative. But it is interesting to note that they gave this opinion in spite of the fact that the handwriting expert called in by the Crown, a certain Mr. Netherclift, a man of standing and sure integrity, declared them to be genuine. A fiercely searching cross-examination could not shake his belief that George himself had signed the alleged certificates. Of Wilmot’s signature he was absolutely certain, and he honestly believed those of Chatham and Dunning also to be genuine.

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All these documents, moreover, since have been impounded, and although kept at Somerset House, nobody may see them—not even by paying the customary shilling.

Perhaps, then, in spite of everything, this story is not altogether mythical.

v

Be this as it may, the lovers' married happiness at any rate could not have lasted long. Indeed, barely had they been made man and wife when a new and crushing misfortune befell them. George, Prince of Wales, found himself suddenly raised to the dignity of King. And, in one moment, love's castle, so laboriously constructed, fell to the ground, shattered like a house of cards.

To be a king, in fact as well as name, the Prince had been born, and nursed, and trained. "George, be King." From earliest childhood an adoring mother had preached this doctrine in his ears. To see him a great ruler, not merely a figure-head, was the summit of her ambitions. Nor was she to be disappointed; the seeds of her advice had not fallen upon barren ground.

Indeed, from the moment that he became King, George III, resolved to *be* King and to be a good king. The magic force of power seized hold of him, and held him spellbound, while within him dawned the consciousness of a great responsibility. Kingship eliminated his manhood; self became absorbed in duty. And before this, his duty to his country, his duty to the dynasty

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he represented, all other obligations faded into nothingness. Opportunity, in short, had made the man, not the man the opportunity.

But, as King, it behoved him before all things to ensure the Protestant succession. Hitherto the sage advice of counsellors who urged him to take a royal consort to himself had moved him only to anger. Now all was different. He needed an heir; his people demanded one of him. And so, after long and anxious communion with himself—what were his true feelings one can only imagine—he informed his astonished Ministers that he had “come to a resolution to demand in marriage the Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, a princess distinguished by every eminent virtue and amiable endowment.”

He had never seen the lady, but rumour declared her to be thoroughly domesticated, and very simple. So George, perhaps, hoped to find in her a meek and worthy consort, who would be able to interest herself in the welfare of his poorer subjects without demanding from him a love that he could never give. Forthwith, then, he sent Lord Harcourt to her with a formal offer of his hand.

The Princess was darning stockings when the ambassador arrived. Nor did she consider the nature of his mission sufficiently important to justify her in ceasing work. In fact, she listened to the proposal with the most astonishing indifference; then expressed herself quite willing to comply with the King of England's

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wishes ; and, after submitting to the customary ordeal of a marriage by proxy, straightway set out to meet her husband.

It was not a romantic scene, the meeting. Charlotte looked bored. George was absurdly nervous, though he assured his mother later in the evening that he already felt a "great affection" for the bride. This was very tactful of him, for, although amiable, Charlotte could not lay claim to beauty.

"Her person," according to Horace Walpole, "was small, and very lean, not well made ; her face pale and homely, her nose somewhat flat and mouth *very large*." But, despite these personal defects, Queen Charlotte proved herself one of the best of the wives of the Kings of England. Even Walpole was impressed by the beauty of her hair. The people adored her. And George at any rate respected and admired her always. She almost won his love. Perhaps she would have, had it not been bestowed already.

But to Hannah this gift had brought little comfort, now that disgrace and contumely had been heaped upon it. George, he who had sworn eternal love and loyalty to her, had been faithless. It was this which stabbed her like a knife. She did not understand that duty ever could demand so big a sacrifice. A tender, clinging little wife, she was not a great adventuress gambling with life, but just a woman, innocent and very human, a little shop-girl who loved with all her simple soul.

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Position held no attractions for her ; she cared not for place and power. Still, she was George's wife, and, if she could not be his queen surely no other woman could be. They were tears of shame, not jealousy, which dimmed her eyes. To think that in return for all that she had given, she must go out into the world an exile, and be forced to wander, homeless and forlorn, from place to place, so that no man might know who or where she was. It seemed a cruel fate.

All that was left to her was a memory, the memory of what might have been. And yet, brave little soul, for the sake of this memory, she cheerfully obeyed love's bidding.

After all, then, this is a very human story, despite its complications and calamities. Nor can even the glamour of romance deprive it of its sadness. There are no letters, it is true, no treasured relics to recall the anxious achings of Hannah's wounded heart. But this surely only makes her love the more pathetic—and the more noble, for not a single word of bitterness did she leave behind her ; and only one of protest.

“Hannah Regina”—thus proudly she signed her will.

During her lifetime she made no endeavour to assert her rights. This she did for George's sake ; she did not wish to make his task more difficult. And he was not ungrateful or unsympathetic. They, who suffer in silence, suffer most. He knew this, and, although he could not bring peace and happiness to the woman he had wronged, he did not forget her children—and his.

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The daughter ultimately married an officer in the Indian Army. And of the sons, the elder settled eventually in America, after fighting bravely in the War of Independence for his father and his King; but the younger, it would seem, was sent to South Africa, and there given a large estate on condition that he would neither marry nor return to England. In his case precautions were necessary, for, it is said, he was the living image of his father.

But what did Queen Charlotte know? Probably everything; George himself, it may be, told her the truth. At any rate, so long as Hannah lived she did not believe herself to be the King's lawful wife, and, after Hannah's death, insisted that he should marry her again. The ceremony was performed secretly at Kew in 1765. The exact date is not known; nor is the place of Hannah's burial.


But she did not die unmourned. "My father would have been a happier man," King George IV is reported to have said, "had he remained true to his marriage with Hannah Lightfoot." Perhaps he would. And, maybe, it was not merely the heavy crown of kingship which later deprived him of his reason. There are heavier burdens for the mind to bear even than the cares of State.

The Story of Princess Amelia

XII

THE STORY OF PRINCESS AMELIA

I

 HIS is not a romance rich in daring deeds of chivalry, in stirring episodes and powerful situations. It is merely a little love story, quite simple, very dainty. In fact, had the heroine been other than the daughter of a king probably it would never have been written; she would have married the hero in the usual way, and with him, no doubt, would have lived happily ever afterwards.

But the heroine was born the daughter of a king; she was a princess of the blood royal, and the heritage of birth stood in her path of happiness, an insuperable obstacle.

The path of true love, however, almost invariably is beset with difficulties. And this is a platitude which calls for no apology, since, laugh at it though one may, one cannot despise it. At any rate, one cannot explain it; it is a mysterious truth which has echoed throughout the ages, and still re-echoes. Love is a whimsical, capricious force, utterly insensible to the fitness of things. In this, perhaps, lies one of the secrets of its infinite attractiveness.

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But that Princess Amelia should have learned to love a commoner was perhaps inevitable, if only for the reason that she happened to be a daughter of King George III, a monarch whose grey hairs literally were brought to the grave by his own and the matrimonial complications of his children. Indeed, almost without exception, the members of his perverse and numerous family, each followed the father's example, and contracted or strove to contract a *mésalliance*.

No wonder, then, eventually he was forced to beg Parliament to make it illegal for members of the Royal Family to marry without the Crown's consent.

The amorous entanglements of his heir alone provided sufficient reasons for the passing of such a measure. Mrs. Fitzherbert, although, no doubt, in many ways an admirable lady, obviously did not possess certain attributes most necessary to a Queen of England. And of seeking to make it possible for her to be recognized as such, George, Prince of Wales, was absolutely capable. This his father knew; he knew only too well that nothing gave the Prince greater joy than to be able to do something calculated to cause annoyance, irrespective of the other consequences.

Still, one cannot help regretting that Amelia also should have been infected with the family weakness. Fate surely ought to have sent in her way some great and brilliant, fascinating prince who would have loved her, claimed her as his bride, and set her up as queen of his dominions. It may be, Fate tried but

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failed to do so, for brilliant, fascinating princes are, no doubt, so very few in number that it is quite impossible always to find one for the youngest of the fifteen children even of a King of England. At any rate, Princess Amelia never found her prince. And so, presumably, it came about that she lost her heart to a commoner.

But this was a lamentable happening. Amelia was a girl whom neither the breath of scandal nor the breath of sorrow ever should have been allowed to touch. Gentle, high-minded, and refined, in her were centred all the family virtues; she was very different from the other children of King George III. And those other children were devoted to her, so also was the Queen; and the nation adored her. But to the King she was the most precious thing in life; George idolized her, and not without reason, for in return she idolized him too.

The Princess was born on August 7, 1783, at Queen's House, a building which in 1825 emerged eventually from the hands of misguided architects as Buckingham Palace. The two children who had preceded her into the world had both died young. Care, therefore, was lavished upon Amelia, the last born, for she too was delicate, even as a baby—alarmingly delicate.

Unlike her sisters, then, who had been kept closely to their books, Amelia, in accordance with her doctor's orders, was allowed to live a normal, healthy life, with the result that she developed into a natural English girl — artistic, musical, and, it is said, a "great

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horsewoman," whilst her precocious, fascinating little ways made her in very truth the idol of the British public.

"Full as tall as Princess Royal, and as much formed, she looks," wrote Madame d'Arblay in 1798, "seventeen, although only fourteen, and has a Hebe blush, an air of modest candour, and a gentleness so caressingly inviting of voice and manner that I have seldom seen a more captivating young creature."

And a captivating young creature she was indeed. What is more, as she increased in years she improved greatly both in health and beauty. "Even dear Amelia," the King wrote to Bishop Hurd, of Worcester, in January, 1800, "is with gigantic steps, by the mercy of Divine Providence, arriving at perfect health." "She was," he continued, "on the 24th of last month, confirmed at her own request by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who seemed much pleased in the preparatory conversation he had with her—at being well grounded in our holy religion and the serious task she has undertaken upon herself."

II

In the following year, however, the King's mind again gave way beneath the strain of his various troubles, political and domestic. The affairs of the Prince of Wales, a "delicate domestic trouble on which," according to Jesse, the tactfully discreet historian, "there is no occasion to dwell," were a sorry worry to him.

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Fortunately, this attack of mental aberration did not last long; and in the summer the King again was well enough to pay his usual visit to Weymouth. And with him went Princess Amelia. The state of her health made a change of air advisable; and so greatly did she benefit from it that, in the autumn, instead of returning to Windsor with her father, she remained at Weymouth, attended only by Miss Gomme, her governess, and General FitzRoy, the King's favourite equerry, who, at George's special request, stayed on at Weymouth solely in order that he might accompany the Princess on her daily rides.

Now, at this time, the Hon. Charles FitzRoy was a man thirty-eight years of age, twenty years older, that is to say, than Amelia. The second son of Lord Southampton, he was himself of semi-royal descent, his uncle, the Duke of Grafton, being a direct descendant of King Charles II.¹ But the first duke's mother had been Barbara Villiers, and so, of course, there was a bar sinister on the family escutcheon, which alone, needless to say, made it impossible for FitzRoy even to hope ever of being recognized as Amelia's husband. This he knew; so did Amelia; but knowledge could not restrain desire; and during those weeks at Weymouth

¹ The belief has been expressed that Charles FitzRoy was himself a son of George III by Hannah Lightfoot. But then, there are people prepared to believe anything in the name of romance, and the only evidence in favour of this theory is the King's affection for the General and the fact that FitzRoy and Amelia were forbidden to marry.

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she learned in her romantic little heart to love very dearly her kindly, handsome soldier escort.

Whilst he . . . well ! he was only a man, and found a something infinitely attractive in the charms of blushing eighteen.

But he strove hard to resist it ; he did not wish to compromise the girl, for he was a noble, generous man ; and, as a loyal servant of his King, could not bring himself to betray the trust which George had reposed in

Now love is a force never to be despised. Indeed, even when love and honour are antagonistic, the former often proves to be the stronger. FitzRoy's acquaintanceship with Amelia, therefore, soon ripened into a closer tie.

This nothing could prevent ; it was the inevitable, for even after their return from Weymouth rarely did a day pass upon which the Princess and equerry did not meet ; they were thrown frequently into each other's company.

FitzRoy always accompanied the monarch on his morning rides. Amelia went also. In the evening, again, he would often join the King and Queen for a game of cards. And so would Amelia. But the King never suspected for a moment that it was more than a mere decree of chance which, day after day, gave to her FitzRoy as partner. Nor did he seem to notice or be surprised that, when out riding, the Princess rode always side by side with the equerry.

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Only Miss Gomme observed these things ; and she knew not what to do, for Amelia was heedless of warnings and advice. Hoping, then, that the girl's infatuation would prove merely to be a passing fancy, for a while she held her peace. But when, after a year, instead of waning, the girl's devotion continued to grow stronger, Miss Gomme deemed it wrong to preserve her silence longer, for both Amelia's health and spirits clearly were being undermined by some unattainable desire.

Accordingly, prompted by the best of motives, Miss Gomme confided her fears in Amelia's sister Mary, who in turn told the secret to Miss Goldsworthy. Now Miss Goldsworthy happened to be as deaf as a post—so deaf, in fact, that, as Fanny Burney declared, it was impossible to tell her anything “but by talking for a whole house to hear every word.” So, of course, the whole house heard of Amelia's infatuation. And, in consequence, Amelia was furiously angry. Miss Gomme's interference, she maintained, was quite uncalled for ; and she wrote an indignant letter to her mother protesting strongly against that misguided but well-meaning lady's conduct.

On hearing the news, Queen Charlotte made it her first concern to keep the King in ignorance ; it would be a cruel blow to him, she felt, to know that Amelia, his youngest and favourite child, had followed the example of her elders, and yielded to an unwise affection.

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So, first, she endeavoured tactfully to allay the storm; and with this object in view, addressed to Amelia a pacific letter, a remarkable document, of prodigious length, in which she barely alluded to FitzRoy, but sought merely to justify the conduct of Miss "Gum."

The latter, she assured Amelia, "being put about *all of you as a Trusty Person* to direct and instruct you, is, by Her Situation, bound in honour to put you on your ~~Guard~~ if she knows, of anything that would be likely to injure you. You will, my dear 'Amelia," she added, "be sensible that neither by words nor by looks did I through the whole Winter show you any disapprobation. In the beginning of Our Settling in Town I was ignorant of what had passed; and when I knew it I took no notice of it, being sure that Miss Gum's advice being well considered must upon any Person which professes Religious Principles have taken every Necessary effect, particularly as You want neither Sense nor Penetration, and consequently must feel that she was a friend to you."

The letter concluded with some sage motherly counsel. "A Wise Man," wrote the Queen, "bears with a Fool, and a Good Man bears up under distress, nay, even bears injury with Patience; and I pray to God that you may become both wise and good. I beseech you let no offence whatever lead you to judge hastily of a Fellow Creature; be always watchful of yourself in every step you take; beware of Flatterers—choice of

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your friends, and do not destroy your Health and Happiness by fancying things worse than they are, and by your following this advice You not only prove your affection to me, but insure to You the warmest Love from

“Your affectionate Mother and Friend

“Charlotte.”

Amelia's outraged feelings were not, however, thus to be pacified. It is true she sent in reply to her mother's letter a polite and dutiful acknowledgment, but she refused to forgive Miss Gorme, declaring that if the latter dared to interfere again, she would appeal immediately to the King for her dismissal.

The Queen was greatly alarmed at this. Her husband's burden of cares already was as much as he could carry—domestic worries, difficulties with Parliament, sedition in Ireland, the “insolence” of Napoleon—it would prove fatal to him to add another. That he should find yet another skeleton in the family cupboard must, the Queen thought, inevitably prove too much for his endurance.

It seemed imperative then to keep Amelia's affairs a secret, or, better still, that they should be hushed up altogether. The morning rides, the card parties, at any rate, must continue uninterrupted, otherwise the King might ask questions which would be hard to answer; for the rest the Queen relied on her daughter's discretion and good sense. Parents have a way of treating their youngest children indulgently. It may

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be, they learn from the elder ones the folly of trying to act in any other way.

Once again, then, the little romance was allowed to pursue the even tenor of its way, just as though nothing had happened. And soon, very soon in fact, the lovers came to an understanding between themselves, a secret understanding, but still a very definite one. This the following letter proves. It is the earliest of the Princess's love letters now extant.

—“My own dear Angel,—I don't know why, but I felt so full that I was quite distressed at speaking to you. . . . How cruel we did not play together (at cards)! I thought your manner to me still as if you had doubts about me. . . . I tell you honestly how jealous I am I don't know! And I dread your hating me. I hope I shall be able to give you this walking to-day at Frogmore. My own dear love, I am sure you love me as well as ever. If you can give me a kind look or word to-night pray do, and look for me to-morrow morning riding; don't leave me! 'Don't send' anything over till this evening, you dear Angel. I go to chapel to-morrow morning—now do sit where I can see you, not as you did last Sunday morning. Good God, what I then have suffered. Do have your hair cut and keep it for me. Promise, after you go up to town for the Meeting of Parliament, you will sit for me for I long for my picture. . . . Did you tell P.W. (Prince of Wales) how wretched we both are? I hoped yesterday, at latest last night, I should have

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heard from you. I dare say you have not time, and, as you wrote that precious note before you went, I ought to have been satisfied but that I never am, separate from you, dear Angel. . . .”

III

Now Queen Charlotte, I trow, had no idea that the affair had advanced so far as this. I very much doubt even if Miss Gomme had ; or, for that matter, anybody, save perhaps the Prince of Wales. Amelia confided all her little troubles in him ; she was really fond of her eldest brother. For some curious reason, all his sisters were. And Amelia's affection, at any rate, the Prince returned in full. So, now that she too had embarked on the troubled waters of romance, he gladly lent her the assistance of his advice and considerable experience.

Why, he asked, should his sister not marry the man she loved ? Marry him, Amelia replied, how could she ? The Royal Marriage Act declared emphatically that she could not marry without first obtaining the Sovereign's consent ; and to ask for that—why, it would be a mere waste of words and time.

The Prince laughed. “Nonsense !” he exclaimed, “why ask the King's consent at all ?” And then, no doubt, he proceeded to show how that it was as easy to drive the proverbial coach-and-four through the Royal Marriage Act as through any other Act of Parliament. In fact, in this it happened to be easier than in

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most cases, since a clause had been inserted and passed, which, to all intents and purposes, defeated the object of the Bill.

If any member of the Royal Family, it declared, "being above the age of twenty-five years, shall persist in his or her resolution to contract a marriage disapproved of, or dissented from, by the King . . . then such descendant, upon giving notice to the King's Privy Council, which notice is . . . to be entered in the books thereof, may at any time from the expiration of twelve calendar months after such notice given . . . contract such marriage . . . and such marriage shall be good . . . unless both Houses of Parliament shall, before the expiration of the said twelve months, expressly declare their disapprobation. . . ."

And, in the happiness of this discovery, it seemed impossible to Amelia that both Houses of Parliament could be so heartless as to forbid her to marry Charles FitzRoy. What harm could such a marriage do? She was very far removed from the succession, and, for that matter, only too gladly would renounce her claims. Forthwith, then, she decided to avail herself of the indulgent clause.

But, alas! several years must elapse before she could do so. She would not be twenty-five until 1808; and even then she would have to wait another year before she could hope to marry.

Yet wait she would. Nothing should shake her loyalty now. No, even though all the crowns of

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Europe were to be laid before her feet in turn, coldly she would reject each of them. And, as proof of her resolve, she assured FitzRoy that already she was his "wife in spirit"; and she took to making use of his initials when signing her letters to him. Now, absurd though it may seem, this pretty, childish fancy often has been used to support the belief that the Princess and FitzRoy already were man and wife—a belief which is barely worth denying, for Mrs. Villiers, who was Amelia's constant and most intimate companion during her later years, has testified to its utter falsity.

But surely the Princess's letters alone are sufficient refutation.

"My ever beloved Angel," she wrote on 7th of February, 1807, "I do hope I shall see you. How I long for it! This is a fine day for Ld. B's¹ marriage, which I hope is a good omen for him, but to me it is melancholy, for I envy those who can marry. I shall send you some commissions to execute for me—that is, to get a watch mended, my curb-chain . . . etc., and to get me some snuff. . . . If I should meet you out, will you, my dear love, come up to me? Remember, you must come to my side of the carriage, and I sit on the right side. . . ."

Or, again: "Your dear letter—O, what a treasure! I shall keep it and read it over and over every day. I do esteem you and love you the better. If we go to town you shall hear to-night, but I hope not. I long

¹ Lord Bagot.

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for a comfortable ride. Pray don't alter in your manner to me in anything, you dear Angel. I really must marry you, though inwardly united, and in reality that is much more than the ceremony, yet that ceremony would be a protection. O my precious darling, how often do I say—would to God my own husband and best Friend and guardian were here to protect me and assist me, as I am sure was destined in Heaven, I should have nothing to fear."

"I envy those who can marry"; "I really must marry"—such phrases surely prove that no secret ceremony had been performed; whilst, incidentally, the allusion to snuff in the former of these letters may help to show that, in spite of all that has been said and written on the subject, the modern girl really is not so horribly modern after all.

She may smoke and play games like a man, but her predecessors, it would seem, took snuff like men—even the gentle Amelia. Yes, but Amelia, it may be, took snuff only when she had FitzRoy to cook it for her, and because now she did not mind what she did, now that she was twenty-four years old. In another twelve months she would be twenty-five.

And then—the thought of laying her petition before the Privy Council thrilled her wildly, so that, despite ill-health, she was in an ecstasy of happiness.

As a matter of fact, she was too happy. Confident now that her love ultimately would triumph, she threw discretion to the winds, ceasing to make any effort to

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conceal her feelings. "Conscious innocence," declared Mrs. Villiers, "prevented her from pausing to consider the opinion of the world, and she gloried in her attachment to so honourable and upright a man as Charles FitzRoy." This, of course, was very silly of her.

At any rate, her "conscious innocence" involved the unhappy girl in a series of overwhelming misfortunes, for which really she had only herself to blame. Her reckless conduct, in short, set the tongue of gossip wagging; rumours spread rapidly in all directions, and before long the story of her little love affair became public knowledge—or, rather, an exaggerated version of that story. In vain her sisters pleaded with her, urging her to be cautious. Amelia would not, could not listen to reason.

And so the climax came. In October, 1807, Miss Gomme, who had already received several anonymous letters accusing her of connivance, being fearful on her own account, endeavoured to throw the responsibility on the Queen, and was foolish enough to declare openly that Her Majesty had promised to sanction the marriage so soon as the King were dead. The Queen, as was only natural, greatly angered by this and similar statements, forthwith called a family council to devise some course of action. Amelia waited anxiously to hear the verdict.

"I had just sealed my letter to you," she wrote to FitzRoy, "when F. (the Duke of York) entered, who I had seen half an hour before in the

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passage, saying he was coming to me. I thought he had come to talk of my affairs, when he shut the door and said, 'I have something to say. All is well now, but there has been a sad row about you and F. R., owing to a d——d Miss Gomme; and the Q. has behaved most nobly, for—as hurt and outrageous as yourself—she has sent me to the Tower Lodge to speak to her, and to represent the improper conduct she has shown. . . .' Fk. (Frederick) told her (the Queen) I was wretched, that kindness might save me, but harshness would lead me to some sad step; but that my attachment was fixed and never could change, and, if we acted as we lately had, no one had a right to find fault. The Q. said, 'I will support her and the family must.' . . ."

Under the circumstances there was nothing else she could say, for she found herself on the horns of a most unfortunate dilemma. Dismiss or even offend Miss Gomme she dared not; the woman had lived too long at Court and learned so many secrets that, as the Queen saw only too clearly, if ruffled, she could prove a very dangerous enemy. On the other hand, to be severe with Amelia would be obviously a fatal policy. It would simply drive the Princess to lay an appeal before the King; and that was a catastrophe which must be avoided at all costs. Accordingly she sought refuge in ignorance, and addressed a letter to Amelia in which she tried to give the impression that, until now, she had never regarded the girl's infatuation seriously.

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"You are now beginning to enter into years of discretion," she wrote, "and will, I do not doubt, see how necessary it is to subdue at once every Passion in the beginning, and to consider the impropriety of indulging any impression which must make you miserable, and be a disgrace to yourself and a misery to all who love you. Add to this the melancholy situation of the King at this present moment,¹ who, could he be acquainted of what has passed, would be miserable for all his life, and I fear it would create a breach in the whole family."

Having despatched this motherly exhortation, the Queen felt happier than she had for many a day; her letter, she thought, could but have the desired effect, and she prided herself on the tactful manner in which she had averted a very delicate family scandal.

As a matter of fact, her action proved the very reverse of tactful. Queen Charlotte had shut her eyes to the truth too long to be justified now in posing as the wise and thoughtful parent. And Amelia resented bitterly this hypocritical attitude, so bitterly that she began seriously to consider the question of eloping. Indeed, it was only by appealing to her affection for her father that Mrs. Villiers finally was able to dissuade her from going to FitzRoy then and there, and imploring him to put an end to all delay.

Still, even had Mrs. Villiers failed, there can be little doubt but that Amelia's lover himself would have succeeded, for his was not the character of the dauntless

¹ George III was mad.

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hero of romance, prepared under all circumstances to assume the initiative. After all, Charles FitzRoy was merely a solid, phlegmatic Britisher, and the fire of duty burned in him ever more brightly than the flame of love ; and the fire of discretion more brightly than either.

Besides, were he to take the law into his own hands and obey the dictates of his heart, he must inevitably lose his position at Court. And that—for he was only a younger son—he could not afford to do ; his small fortune was much too slender to support a disinherited princess, especially an extravagant one. Even as things were, Amelia owed him £5,000, which she had borrowed recently. True, she had spent it all on charity. None the less, she had spent it !

IV

FitzRoy then, also, urged her to be patient, and to consider all her actions carefully. “Dear as *you* are to me,” he wrote, “you cannot wonder, after the confidence you have reposed in me, my feeling every circumstance that regards you more than that regards me, and I firmly believe we both feel this mutually. Judge then how anything injurious to you and above all your *blessed virtue and character* is galling to myself.”

But even her lover’s wise admonitions proved unavailing. Amelia, mad with impatience, was heedless of the consequences of her indiscretions. And so it came about that the inevitable happened.

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In the spring of 1808, the King learned the story of his daughter's love affair. For a moment he could not believe it. That Amelia, little Amelia whom he loved and trusted, could be guilty of such a folly—yes, and FitzRoy too—seemed incredible; the shock unnerved him.

But soon anger took the place of surprise and disappointment, and then . . . exactly what happened can only be imagined; but father and daughter certainly exchanged some angry, bitter words. Indeed, seeing that the Princess subsequently referred to the King as her "late father," the interview must have been a very stormy one. And to Amelia this quarrel with her father came as the culmination of her troubles, especially seeing that now, in her hour of need, the family all forsook her—with one exception; the Prince of Wales alone stood by her. His help fortified her not a little. He begged his little sister not to worry. If only she would be patient, he said, all would be well. Besides, in a few months she would be twenty-five, and then . . .

But this was meagre consolation. Amelia despaired now ever of seeing the day of her emancipation. Her health, long overtaxed, had broken down completely beneath the weight of all her sorrows; and the symptoms, unmistakably those of consumption, already gave the doctors cause for serious alarm. The shadow of death lay broad across her path. Amelia herself could see it.

"You will, my own dear Charles," she wrote, "receive this when your torment is gone for ever—remember, my

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own darling, since I first knew you I have never experienced anything but kindness, and be assured my affection and esteem has only increased with my knowing you better. . . . I owe you all my happiness and comfort. Situation has prevented my wishes being realized which inwardly they have long been, and I consider myself as your lawful wife. May God bless you and make you happy. Don't forget me, and think of her who died blessing and loving you, and who lived only for you."

Thus, while the poor girl lay very ill, rapidly, so it seemed, sinking to her grave, the slow months rolled by. Spring gradually gave way to summer. August came at last. The Princess was still alive ; and, on the 7th day of the month, attained the age of twenty-five.

For a while she rallied bravely ; hope and excitement breathed new life into her. Perhaps even yet, she thought, it might be allowed to her to marry. Forthwith, she laid her petition before the Privy Council ; then wrote to her eldest brother to tell him of her action.

"I determined long ago," she said, "to act as I now do ; . . . and according to the Act made by my late Father, I find I must inform you and the Privy Council through the Lord Chancellor ; . . . and I hope as my whole comfort depends on this event, that you will not be my enemy. . . . It is not a hasty action of mine, . . . besides I never could marry where I could not give my affections, and General FitzRoy possesses all my affection, and nothing can alter that. . . . Deceive you I

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never will, and I think it best to tell you I have delayed taking any step with him for his peculiar position about my Father, and not to hurt my Father. That being removed, I feel it owing to myself to act decidedly, and never can I alter in any one idea I have determined on. Therefore that is useless, and we should be trifling with each other were I to let you suppose that was possible."

This done, the Princess, buoyed up by hope, set herself patiently to wait. Then, as the months passed, and still Parliament uttered no word of dissent, hope became confidence. The girl's health and spirits both revived.

The change, however, was merely a fleeting rally; she could restrain, but she could not throw off the fatal malady which had assailed her; and now gradually it fastened its grim hold again.

Bravely she struggled with it, but in vain; the dawn of each day found her weaker. "She has so little chance of happiness in this world," Mrs. Villiers wrote, "that I believe it is selfish to wish her to live, and with such a mind as hers she must be pretty certain of happiness in the next. The longer her illness lasts the more perfect she appears. I never in my life met with such sweetness of temper and resignation as hers, and such wonderful consideration for all those who she thinks love her."

But the King, poor man, was overwhelmed with sorrow when at last he realized that Amelia's life was

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ebbing out. He felt that, in a very large measure, he had been the cause of her suffering, and would have done anything to atone for his harshness. "His whole soul," a Court chronicler has said, "became absorbed in the fate of his daughter ; he dwelt on it with harassing and weakening grief and despair. On some occasions he kept the physicians, when they made their report, two or three hours in minute inquiries ; indeed so restless was his anxiety that he was accustomed to receive a report every morning at seven o'clock, and afterwards every two hours of the day."

Amelia, and Amelia's happiness, meant everything to him now in his lonely blind old age. And surely there is something truly pathetic in his loving tenderness. For the girl's one transgression against his wishes he forgave her wholly. Indeed, whenever he visited her, as he did every afternoon, he always brought General FitzRoy with him. He knew that this would give her pleasure. And there, by her bedside, father and lover would sit talking to her. But the King did not know that Amelia used also to receive clandestine visits from the General.

Nor was he meant to know ; these meetings were arranged by Amelia's sisters, Mary and Augusta ; and the hours thus spent alone with her faithful lover were quite the happiest that she lived.

But even they were numbered. At last came the afternoon of the 1st of November. At three o'clock the King and his equerry called as usual to see the

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sufferer. As they entered the room, the Princess raised herself on her pillows, and stretching out her arm took her blind father's hand in hers. Then she slipped a ring on his finger, a ring which she had had specially made for him. On it was a crystal tablet containing a lock of her hair, and inscribed with these words :—

“Amelia—Remember Me.”

“Pray wear this for my sake,” she said, “and I hope you will not forget me.”

“That I can never do,” replied the King. “You are engraven on my heart.” Then he burst into tears and, bending down, kissed her—for the last time.

And FitzRoy could see that kiss must be the last. He was standing beside the King, and his grief was harder to bear if only because it had to be endured in silence.

Now Amelia noticed his sadness—perhaps, too, she divined the reason of it, for, with a wan, tender smile, she held out her hand to him. For a moment he bent over it, pressing it to his lips. Then, without making any other sign, he turned and, taking his royal master by the arm, led him gently from the room.

Princess Amelia he never saw again—alive. On the following day he received a note from Princess Mary. He recognized the writing, and could guess the subject of her letter before even he had torn the seal. This is what the Princess had written :—

“My dear FitzRoy, our beloved Amelia is no more, but her last words to me were, ‘Tell Charles I

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die blessing him.' Before I leave this house, I obey her last wishes."

"Far or near, your affectionate friend, Mary."

Thus ends this story. At the funeral, which took place by torchlight two days later, no room could be found for the chief and truest mourner. And, although by will the Princess left most of her possessions to Charles FitzRoy, the General waived his right to them.

This he did at the Prince of Wales' request: 'Were he to press his claim, the Prince declared, not only would he offend and wound the King, but would make public the story of Amelia's love for him. This FitzRoy declined to do. Her devotion was much too precious to be made the food for gossip; and her good name, even in death, of far greater worth to him than riches.

In 1816 the General married, but still the memory of Amelia remained vividly in his mind; there, indeed, it always lived. And of that memory—the memory of the girl who had died for love of him—surely even Mrs. FitzRoy could not be jealous.

